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ABSTRACT

More than 95 percent of the 1,414 members of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), responding to a survey about student attendance, cited one or more problems. The first five chapters report the survey findings and those of other studies and polls concerning attendance matters. One issue discussed is why students stay away from school and what can be done to improve the situation; another concerns the identification of dropouts, their number, characteristics, and the economic factors that affect them. Future demographic and enrollment trends are projected. The last three chapters of the report detail how administrators and boards of education are trying to keep students in school. The chapter "Practices" contains findings of the survey: how many districts are following written attendance policies, attendance-taking practices of teachers, and who is responsible for attendance. The chapter "Policies" analyzes school attendance policies submitted by more than 700 school boards. The chapter "Problems" illustrates workable ideas and programs at the federal, state, and local levels to deal with all forms of nonattendance and to reduce dropout rates. (Author/MLF)

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AASA Critical Issues Report

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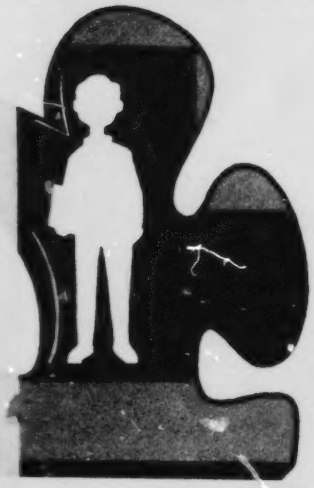

KEEPING STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

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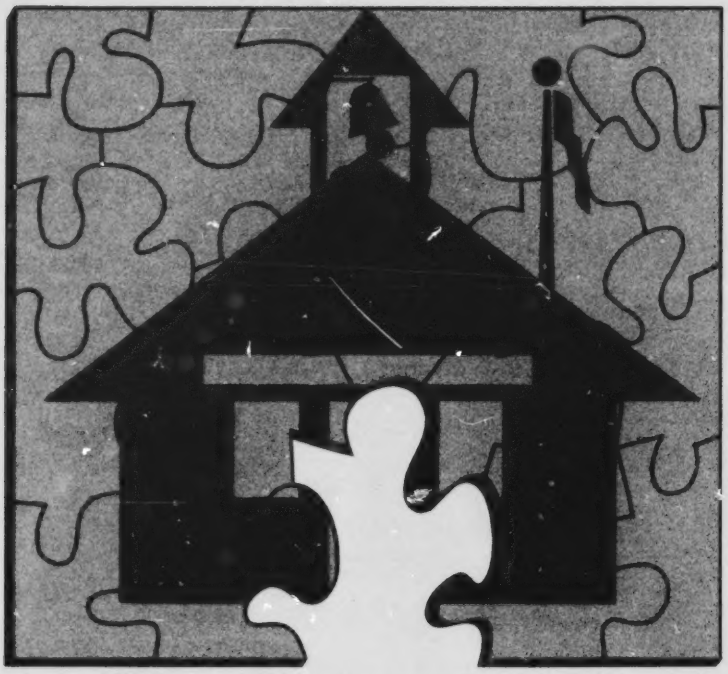

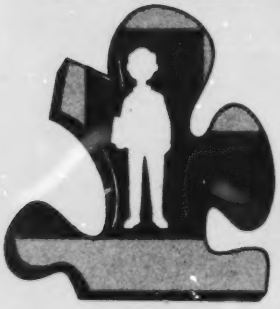

KEEPING STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Editor: Shirley Boes Neill

Produced by
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Sacramento, Calif.
for the
American Association of School Administrators

The AASA Critical Issues Series

Many of the critical issues facing schools today are controversial. Some are new. None has a single best answer. Yet, administrators and boards of education must determine what is best for their communities. Realizing this, the American Association of School Administrators saw the need for a new series of in-depth reports to help administrators and boards.

This is the fourth report in the AASA Critical Issues Series. Like the others, it provides an in-depth analysis of the root causes and possible answers to a critical school problem. Special emphasis is placed on "how to" suggestions from successful programs, thus saving schools the costly and time-consuming effort of "reinventing the wheel." The goal is to help schools learn from the successes and failures of others — and from the lessons of research — in clear, non-jargon English.

Our thanks to all those who helped — school administrators, board members, state education agency personnel, state legislative staff members. The manuscript was written by Shirley Boes Neill of Sacramento, Calif., and Gaye Vandermyn of Seattle, Wash. Research assistance was provided by the San Mateo Education Resources Center, Redwood City, Calif., and by the Department of Research and Information, Education Commission of the States, Denver.

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This report was reviewed by AASA and approved for publication. Approval does not signify that the contents reflect the views and policies of AASA.

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Overview

Keeping students in school — always a problem of some concern — escalated to the "critical issue" category for school administrators and school boards as the 1970s came to an end.

The reasons are not hard to find. A mixture of developments converged on schools at the same time:

- More students are deliberately playing truant — skipping the classes they don't like and missing the whole day as it suits them.
- Declining enrollment, which means less state aid and thus the liklihood of cuts in "non-basic" classes, alternative programs and the support personnel that encourage regular school attendance.
- The dropout rate is rising again, after successful efforts in the 1960s and early 1970s to reduce it to the lowest level in the nation's history.

Concern for these new trends and what they mean to schools was expressed in the results of an **AASA Critical Issues Survey** conducted for this report. It found that truancy is now a top priority problem confronting the nation's schools.

More than one-half of the 1,414 AASA members who responded to the survey cited casual class cutting or casual cutting of the whole school day as a serious problem. But not many had found solutions. Only one in five respondents (18 percent) said they had found effective answers. Many of them are reported in detail in this report.

Only a few of the respondents — 4.7 percent — claimed to be free of attendance problems.

Concern over increased truancy has spread beyond the schools. Legislative committees in some states are pushing for action at the state level. Pressure is being applied to state departments of education and to local school districts to enforce compulsory attendance laws and to find legal, positive ways to deal with students who are absent excessively.

Reasons for the current legislative interest are varied. In New York, a task force of the State Senate said New York City's declining economy is due partially to high dropout rates, particularly for black youth. In California, a team directed by the State Auditor General found actual attendance to be well below reported counts for state aid purposes. Actual attendance, the auditors said, average 83.8 percent of total enrollment and fell as low as 75.9 percent in some senior high schools. However, the average daily attendance figure reported to the state for aid purposes was approximately 96 percent.

In several other states, officials of the state department of education questioned and sometimes refused to publish in official reports the attendance and truancy figures reported to them by local school districts.

Reports such as those completed by the California Auditor General and several state departments of education are causing some observers to question seriously all state and federal attendance and dropout figures. This uncertainty over attendance figures is a major concern of state governments for obvious reasons. Legislators do not want to allocate money to schools for students who are not there.

In some districts, fear of failure of minimum competency tests by large numbers of students has led administrators and boards of education to stiffen attendance requirements. By doing so, they are giving credence to the long-held contention of teachers: "You can't teach students who aren't in class."

A frequently heard criticism of legislative committees and of state level attendance officials is that administrators and teachers don't care about students who don't care enough about school to show up. To illustrate: A state legislative aide said in an interview for this report: "Schools just don't seem to want to bother with kids who cause trouble." A state attendance official said: "There is a great deal of indifference in some schools as to whether students attend or not." An attendance official in another state asked: "What can you do about kids who don't want to be in school?"

Answering that question — What do you do? — is not easy. "There is no single solution to the school absenteeism problem," said Bill Ruth, director of attendance and welfare for the Los Angeles County Schools. "To restore reason and responsibility to the universally deteriorating condition of school attendance will require a commitment to 'do battle' on many fronts."

What are school districts doing? A review of numerous programs and more than 700 school board policies submitted for this report indicates these trends:

- Districts are increasingly taking the attitude that school attendance is the responsibility of parents and students.
- Many school districts are adopting policies which base grades, course credit and sometimes promotion wholly or partially on minimum attendance requirements.
- Some districts, fed up with parents who "cover" for their child's illegal absences, are reserving the right to determine the legality of excuses and override the parents' objections.
- Many districts are eliminating the long-time practice of accepting notes on the return of an absent child to school. Instead, they are requiring parents to call the school by a certain time on the day of the absence.
- Many districts have developed formulas for converting class skips and lateness to official absences, e.g., three tardies equal one absence.
- Districts cognizant of possible legal entanglements are revising policies to build in strict due process requirements and to reflect the commonly accepted belief that regular attendance and educational growth are related.

Although most states and school districts do not keep exact records on dropouts, evidence indicates that the percentage of dropouts is increasing. Washington State, for example, recorded an average 68 percent increase in the number of dropouts from 1962 to 1976. The state figures show, moreover, that the actual dropout rates are higher than indicated because summer dropouts are not included in official tallies.

Indications of revived national concern about high school dropouts are surfacing. Several recent reports warn, for example, that the nation's changing demographics should command the attention and best thinking of school administrators. Between 1980 and 1983, the nation's public school enrollment will decline about 1.6 million students, or about one-third as many as in the 1970s. At the same time, however, schools will be serving more students who come from one-parent homes, more students of minority background, more students from non-English speaking families. These are the students who tend to experience more attendance problems and to drop out of school before graduation. Thus, if the past is prologue, attendance problems are likely to continue to increase in the years ahead.

This report attempts to piece together many different parts of the attendance puzzle. It also describes how some districts have successfully met the challenge of keeping students in school.

The final word belongs to Earl R. Finley, an administrator who believes there is an attendance dilemma. Finley, superintendent of the 700-student Knob Noster (Mo.) Public Schools, said:

"Most educators believe schools do have legal responsibilities for school attendance, and they believe in the well documented relationship between regular attendance and educational growth. In addition, they recognize that public schools are not dealing with a clientele totally devoted to achievement and educational progress. However, many a youngster learns, achieves and later succeeds because he is required to do certain things. Cajoling, encouraging and some intimidation have been necessary elements in leading some youngsters to learning. . . . The complexities of the attendance crisis . . . offer no simple solutions. Perhaps a combination of teacher effort in the classroom, good judgment by principals and understanding by parents is the only feasible approach."

CHAPTER I

School Attendance:
Findings of the Critical Issues Survey

Keeping students in school is a major problem for the nation's school administrators. This conclusion emerges from the results of a survey conducted for this **Critical Issues Report** and from other studies.

More than 95 percent of the 1,414 AASA members responding to the **Critical Issues Survey** — most of them school superintendents — cited one or more attendance problems.

The most worrisome attendance problem for school administrators is truancy of one kind or another. More than half (58 percent) of the respondents to the survey expressed concern about casual class cutting. Moreover, 51 percent said casual cutting of whole school days was a problem in their districts.

AASA Critical Issues Report

Question 1:

Which of the following student attendance issues are problems in your district? Please check as many as apply.

Number and Percentage of Administrators Reporting Attendance Problems

(N)	%	Problem
824	58.3	Casual class cutting
721	51.0	Casual cutting of whole school days
635	29.6	Chronic absenteeism from school
494	34.9	Chronic tardiness
449	31.8	Chronic absenteeism from individual classes
418	29.6	Early dropouts
318	22.5	Suspension and expulsion
66	4.7	No problem

Other attendance concerns of administrators, in rank order, are: chronic absenteeism from school, chronic tardiness, chronic absenteeism from individual classes, early dropouts and suspension and expulsion. Only 4.7 percent of the respondents said they had no attendance problems.

A further breakdown of the responses to Question No. 1 reveals that administrators of districts of more than 5,000 students report more attendance problems than do their counterparts in smaller school districts. For example, while slightly more than half (52 percent) of the respondents who administer school districts of 5,000 or fewer students identified casual class cutting as a local problem, about three-fourths of the respondents who administer larger districts did so. And while only one out of every four administrators of the smaller school districts cited "early dropouts" as a problem, more than one out of every two administrators of the largest districts did so.

How Many Students Are Absent?

More than half (52 percent) of the administrators responding to the survey for this **Critical Issues Report** said more than 5 percent of the enrolled students are absent on an average day.

Approximately 47 percent of those responding to Question No. 2 reported absentee rates of 6 to 10 percent on an average day. Average absentee rates of 4 to 5 percent were reported by 39 percent of the respondents. [The National Center for Health Statistics estimates that a normal school absentee rate due to illiness would average 4 to 5 percent.]

Less than one-half of the survey respondents provided a breakdown between excused and unexcused absences. Of those who did so, more than half said that 95 percent of the absences on an average day were excused. Many of the respondents who failed to break down figures noted that their district either did not keep records or that the records were suspect because of the parental practice of "covering" for their child's failure to attend class or school.

AASA Critical Issues Report

Question 1A:

Which of the following student attendance issues are problems in your district?

Percent of Administrators Reporting Attendance Problems				
1,000 to 5,000 students	5,001 to 10,000 students	10,001 to 25,000 students	More than 25,000 students	Problem
52.0	74.6	72.8	76.5	Casual class cutting
47.5	62.0	66.4	69.1	Casual cutting of whole day
37.5	56.8	54.4	69.0	Chronic absenteeism from school
30.6	44.0	48.0	67.9	Chronic tardiness
24.5	40.6	40.0	58.0	Chronic absenteeism from individual classes
23.5	40.6	39.2	55.5	Early dropouts
15.1	37.5	35.2	50.6	Suspensions and expulsions
5.6	3.0	1.6	0	No problem

Big City School Systems: Bigger Attendance Problems?

In response to the survey conducted for this **Critical Issues Report**, the majority (67.7 percent) of administrators of big city districts reported average daily absentee rates of 5 percent or less. Their districts ranged in size from 25,000 to nearly 1 million students.

Only 5.8 percent of the 69 administrators of the largest districts reported absenteee rates ranging from 11 to 15 percent; 4.3 percent reported average daily rates of 16 to 20 percent; and another 4.3 percent reported absentee rates as high as 21 to 25 percent. Local studies and newspaper and magazine stories often paint a grimmer picture for inner-city junior high and high schools within the big school systems.

In New York City, the district's 1978-79 absentee rate was 18 percent, according to Irving Bercheck, director of the district's Office of Pupil Personnel Services. That's down from the widely publicized 1977 reports of a 20-percent-plus average absentee rate, which resulted in the use of special police truant squads to apprehend and return more than 17,000 youngsters to school. Since 1970, the average absentee rate has been above 16 percent, with the average high school rate above 20 percent.

The Chicago Public Schools reported a citywide school attendance rate of 89 percent in 1976-77, with general high schools reporting the poorest record. The average daily absentee rate recorded for the general high schools was 15.4 percent in contrast to 11 percent for the district's vocational high schools.

In Seattle, Wash., the systemwide absentee rate is 8.1 percent. It is much higher, however, for some schools within the district. In 1978-79, for example, Seattle school officials reported that five of 88 elementary schools had absentee rates above 10 percent. Seven of Seattle's 16 junior highs reported that more than 10 percent of their students were absent on an average day, as did seven of the district's 12 general high schools. Even more serious attendance problems were reported for six of Seattle's alternative, continuation or career training programs: absentee rates hovered around 50 percent on a typical day. Seattle schools reported a dropout rate of 9.3 percent for 1977-78. Half of the dropouts had been suspended, and 89 percent of the suspended dropouts were suspended for irregular attendance or truancy. Seattle, like many urban systems, must cope with many other and sometimes related problems, in addition to school attendance problems. Seattle's difficulties include declining enrollment and staff cutbacks, a new busing/integration program, a long teachers strike and levy difficulties.

Lost dollars as well as lost students: Loss of state aid because of absentee students impacts seriously on big city school budgets. Examples: Here's what missing students cost five city school systems in one year:

City	*Absentee Rate*	*Loss in State Aid*
Atlanta	5%	$ 1 million
Chicago	11%	$ 6.5 million
Houston	10%	$ 1 million
Phoenix	14%	$ 1.13 million
San Francisco	9%	$ 4.4 million

Question 2:

On an average day in your district, what percent of enrolled students are absent?

Number and Percentage of Respondents by District Size

District Size	Absentee Rate on an Average Day						
	3% or less	4-5%	6-10%	11-15%	16-20%	21-25%	26-30%
Under 5,000	10.7% (91)	40.9% (348)	44.0% (374)	3.5% (30)	0.4% (4)	0.1% (1)	0.2% (2)
5,001 to 10,000	3.1% (6)	40.4% (78)	55.4% (107)	0.1% (2)	—	—	—
10,001 to 25,000	—	34.9% (43)	62.6% (77)	2.4% (3)	—	—	—
Over 25,000	4.3% (3)	30.0% (20)	52.2% (36)	5.8% (4)	4.3% (3)	4.3% (3)	—
Totals	(100)	(489)	(594)	(39)	(7)	(4)	(2)
% Total Responses	8.1%	39.0%	47.4%	3.1%	0.6%	0.3%	0.2%

N = 1,235
(Respondents not reporting district size are not included)

Number and Percentage of Respondents by Region

	Absentee Rate on an Average Day						
	3% or less	4-5%	6-10%	11-15%	16-20%	21-25%	26-30%
Northeast	12.7% (24)	40.0% (122)	47.2% (144)	4.6% (14)	—	—	0.3%
Southeast	4.2% (8)	35.8% (69)	57.5% (111)	2.1% (4)	—	0.5% (1)	—
Central	11.7% (68)	41.2% (240)	43.4% (253)	2.6% (15)	1.0% (6)	0.1% (1)	—
West	5.6% (14)	37.4% (93)	50.2% (125)	4.8% (12)	0.8% (2)	0.8% (2)	0.4% (1)
Totals	(114)	(524)	(633)	(45)	(8)	(4)	(2)
% Total Response	8.6%	39.4%	47.6%	3.4%	0.6%	0.3%	0.2%

N = 1,330

Federal Estimates

Federal estimates put the average daily absentee rate for the nation's schools at 6.4 percent. That estimate comes from Vance Grant of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Based on a total public school enrollment of 43.7 million in 1977, that means at least 2.8 million students missed class on an average day in the 1977-78 school year. Two years earlier, more students were absent on an average day. But total enrollment was also higher. At that time, approximately 6.3 percent of public school students were missing on an average day.

Federal statistician Grant bases his estimate of the absentee rate on the difference between the average daily membership figures and average daily attendance reported by each state. Other estimates, which put the average daily absentee rate at about 10 percent nationwide, are based on the difference between average daily enrollment and attendance. These estimates are probably not as accurate as Grant's because they involve some double counting of students who transferred during the school year.

There are additional problems in making estimates of absentee rates. Few states or even local school districts make their headcounts of students in exactly the same way. Many do not count absentees on a daily basis. Some take and report an official absentee rate based on a headcount of only one or two days during a reporting period. Some count only unexcused absences. And, in a few school districts in two states, deliberate miscounts of the number of students showing up for class have been discovered.

Negative Results of Poor Attendance

School administrators were asked to indicate in response to the **Critical Issues Survey** what was the most negative result of poor school attendance. Many administrators reported several negative results. "Permanent intellectual and/or vocational damage to student dropouts" received top ranking.

Here's a breakdown of how the seven reasons included in the survey were ranked by respondents.

Negative Results of Poor Student Attendance
Ranked by Order of Importance

Rank	Negative Results	(N)	Percentage
1	Permanent intellectual and/or vocational damage to student dropout	540	38.2
2	Overall lowering of academic standards and achievement in the school	348	24.7
3	Frustration and morale problems experienced by teachers	299	21.1
4	Poor impression of the schools by the community at large	261	18.4
5	Increased paperwork and record keeping for teachers and administrators	237	16.8
6	Vandalism and petty crime perpetrated by truants	48	3.4
7	Reduced state aid computed on basis of average daily attendance	36	2.5

Reduced State Aid

School administrators responding to the **Critical Issues Survey** ranked "reduced state aid" at the bottom of the list of negative results of poor student attendance. When asked specifically if their district suffered any financial loss because of student absences, 63 percent of the 851 administrators answering the question said no. Another 27 percent indicated their district lost some financial aid because of absentees. Ten percent said they did not know if their district lost any financial aid because complicated state aid formulas made a computation of loss from unexcused absences difficult to determine.

Some administrators noted that their state aid formula made no distinction between excused and unexcused absences, while other respondents noted that averaging, weighting, time and method of counting per-pupil state support figures obscured the effect of unexcused absences on their state aid allotment.

In response to the survey question, 204 administrators or 14.4 percent of the total respondents reported a specific annual dollar loss for unexcused absences. The total, as reported by the 204 administrators from all parts of the country: $71.4 million.

Parent Support

About three out of every four respondents to the **Critical Issues Survey** said parents in their districts are generally supportive of disciplinary actions taken against students who are excessively absent. Only slight variations were found among assessments of parent support in comparisons of different regions and district size.

Slightly more respondents from the Northeast (78.4 percent) rated parents supportive, and slightly fewer (73.2 percent) from the West did so.

A total of 67 administrators or 4.8 percent of those responding to the question rejected both a yes or no response to write in "50-50" as their assessment of parent support. Typical comments from these respondents included the following:

- "Most parents voice support of school's efforts, but seem powerless to improve youngsters' attendance — especially for youngsters enrolled at the secondary level."
- "Parents are generally supportive if the approach made by the schools is positive and parents fully understand the disciplinary action."

Adequacy of State Law

Nearly one out of three respondents to the **Critical Issues Survey** (30.6 percent) assess the laws in their state as "vague or silent on matters of school attendance." The respondents did so in answer to a question on the survey which asked: "Most states have laws that prescribe certain actions and proscribe others in defining and preventing unexcused absences. How would you assess the laws in your state?"

The respondents could choose from the following categories:

- Generally, the laws demand that I do more than I think necessary.
- Generally the laws tie my hands and prevent me from doing what I think useful.
- Generally, the laws are vague or silent on matters of student attendance.
- Generally, the legislature is indifferent to helping solve school problems.
- The laws are adequate.
- The compulsory attendance law should be lowered.
- The laws are adequate, but enforcement by officials and the courts should be stricter.

Fewer respondents from districts in the Northeast (20.2 percent) assessed their state laws as silent or vague than did respondents from the Southeast (26.5 percent), from the Central region (34.9 percent) or from the West (33.7 percent).

Fewer administrators from the Southeast (9.3 percent) than from other regions felt state laws tied their hands, preventing them from doing what they believe is necessary.

More respondents from the West appear dissatisfied with state laws on attendance than respondents from other regions. They more frequently checked all negative categories than did administrators from other regions.

An often-repeated brief assessment written in by respondents was: "Laws adequate; courts don't enforce them" or "Officials don't enforce laws." One respondent said: "Courts should place greater emphasis upon truancy and educational neglect cases and provide for placement facilities where needed."

Administrators were invited to note on the **Critical Issues Survey** any ideas for changes in attendance laws. A typical response was the following: "Lower the compulsory age to eighth grade completion. Our hands are tied. Students over age 16 who are truant should be told 'good-bye' for the balance of the quarter. They cause more problems around the school than good."

Effective Programs

Fewer than one out of five respondents (18 percent) to the **Critical Issues Survey** said they had an effective program for dealing with truancy. A total of 82.1 percent declared they had no effective program or they failed to respond to the question.

Responses to other questions on the survey indicated that more school administrators from the largest school districts had more serious attendance, truancy and dropout problems than did their counterparts in districts serving fewer students. More administrators from the largest districts — 26 percent—also said they have an effective program for dealing with truancy.

CHAPTER II

School Attendance:
Findings of Other Studies and Polls

Interviews with state and local officials and a review of other recent studies indicate that attendance matters will receive more attention in the future. For one thing, legislative groups in several states are inquiring about and, in some cases, are casting suspicious glances at reported attendance figures.

Here briefly are findings and recommendations resulting from some of the studies:

- In California, state auditors found fewer students in attendance than reported by school districts for state aid purposes. Two results: Pressure is being applied to the State Department of Education to put more pressure on school districts regarding attendance accounting. Some districts reportedly tightened procedures in the wake of the auditors report.
- In New York, a state senate task force looked into truancy. It criticized the New York City Board of Education for agreeing in negotiations to relieve teachers of attendance duties. One of its recommendations: Make attendance of students a criterion in the evaluation of all teachers and administrators.
- In Illinois, a study revealed that truancy is typically a more frequently occurring problem in high schools, in urban schools and in large school districts. The study also revealed that these schools and districts have many more alternatives and resources available for dealing with truancy.
- The Rhode Island State Department of Education prepared an excellent analysis of the state's dropout problem, which questioned the reliability and accuracy of school districts in reporting truancy cases.
- A report prepared for the Los Angeles City Board of Education linked violet crime on school campuses with absentee students.

More details on these and other studies and polls follow:

Absenteeism: The No. 1 Headache Of Secondary Principals

Student absenteeism is the top ranking headache of high school principals. That's what the principals themselves have been saying since 1973 in response to annual surveys conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

A 1977 survey of public secondary school principals sponsored by the National Institute of Education found, moreover, that 35 percent of the principals considered student absenteeism a "serious" or "very serious" problem in their districts.

Skipping class, truancy and lateness to class were identified as the top three most pressing problems facing 200 randomly selected high school administrators in New York and California in a 1976 survey conducted by Daniel Duke, professor of education at Stanford University.

Elementary principals: Keeping students in school is less of a problem for elementary principals. Nevertheless, it is not one that can be easily dismissed. To illustrate: The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) found in early 1979 that 43 percent of more than 1,600 respondents to an NAESP survey consider pupil absenteeism either a "serious" problem or "a problem."

California: Auditors Find Discrepancies

In California, physical counts of students in classrooms showed actual attendance substantially below that reported by school districts for purposes of allocation of state funds. The counts were taken by staff members of the office of the state auditor general in a random sample of 1,780 class-

rooms in 48 schools in the fall of 1978. The auditors visited 24 high schools, 12 junior high schools and 12 elementary schools.

Student attendance averaged 83.8 percent of the total classroom enrollment, according to the California auditors. More specifically, the auditors found average attendance levels in the classrooms visited as follows:

- Elementary schools 90.8 percent
- Junior high schools 87.7 percent
- Senior high schools 81.4 percent
- Senior highs with high AFDC counts* 75.9 percent
- Urban senior high schools 79.1 percent

* Those with 10 percent or more of students from families receiving Aid for Dependent Children.

The auditors also included in their report to the California State Legislature the attendance figures reported by school districts for purposes of fund allocations during 1977-78. The reported ADA (average daily attendance) was approximately 96 percent of the enrollment. The ADA reported for grades K-3 and 4-8 was 98 percent and for grades 9-12, 93 percent.

The auditing team noted in its report that "the bulk of public school financial support in California — which totaled over $8 billion in 1977-78 — is computed on the basis of units of ADA." (The ADA formula includes both students actually in attendance and those verified as absent for reasons of illness, quarantine, medical or dental appointments, funeral services of a member of the student's immediate family.)

The auditors found that one factor associated with varying attendance levels was racial-ethnic composition of the student body. High schools with over 50 percent of their student body from racial-ethnic minority groups had average attendance of 78.3 percent while those with less than 10 percent of students from racial-ethnic minority groups had average attendance of 86.6 percent.

Attendance was lowest, the auditors found, on Fridays. It was lower in the afternoons than in the mornings. It was higher in classes such as foreign languages, science and music and lower in special education classes. Kindergarten attendance (88.5 percent) was lowest among all elementary grades. Elementary attendance ranged from 82 percent to 94 percent.

In addition to the classroom counting, the auditors tried to determine the main reasons for student absence. They received answers to a query from 428 individuals, including school administrators, attendance personnel, counselors, teachers and students. Another 800 persons responsible for

Ranking of Reasons for Pupil Absence in California Schools

Reasons for Pupil Absenteeism	Attendance Staff (N = 60)	Administrators* (N = 145)	School Nurses (N = 11)	Teachers (N = 130)	Students (N = 82)	Total (N = 428)
Illness	1	1	2	1	2	1
Dislike or boredom with school	4	2	1	3	1	2
Lack of appropriate options within educational optional system	13	9	8	10	9	10
Social adjustment problems	5	3	3	5	7	3
Academic problems	7	4	4	6	4	6
Fear of school due to violence/ vandalism	14	13	12	13	10	13
School busing	11	14	13	14	14	14
Employment	12	11	14	12	12	12
Drug abuse/alcoholism	10	12	11	11	8	11
Pregnancy/parenthood	15	15	15	15	13	15
Influence of friends	6	5	5	4	3	5
Rebellion against school rules	8	8	6	9	5	8
Have to help at home	3	7	9	7	16	7
Babysitting	9	10	10	8	15	9
Family or personal business	2	6	7	2	6	4

* Note: Respondents included school principals, vice-principals, counselors, and district and county administrative staff.

implementing attendance requirements also answered the query. The results were similar: The main reasons for nonattendance, according to the respondents, are illness, dislike or boredom with school, social adjustment problems, family or personal business, influence of friends and academic problems. (See the table detailing the reasons for nonattendance as viewed by the group of 428 individuals).

In addition to the 15 reasons cited in the table, respondents also cited these other factors as principal reasons for student absenteeism: lack of procedures or authority for enforcing attendance laws, lack of parental concern or control, and factors such as learning difficulties, gang and peer pressure or impersonal classrooms.

When the respondents from schools, districts and counties were asked to rank problems related to enforcement of attendance laws and regulations, they emphasized lack of sufficient attendance enforcement authority, lack of parent cooperation/responsibility for student attendance and insufficient staff devoted to attendance enforcement.

What should be done: School personnel suggested a variety of approaches for addressing attendance problems.

They opted for improved accountability at the state level for student absenteeism, including periodic reports of school attendance in individual schools and districts, independent audits of school district attendance figures on a spot-check basis, identification and dissemination of information about exemplary projects to improve attendance and the establishment of a state-level School Attendance Review Board (SARB). (Note the following findings, however, about county and local SARBs.)

School Attendance Review Boards (SARBs) are limited in their effectiveness, according to numerous school personnel and county probation and juvenile justice staff responding to the queries of the state auditors. The SARBs were established by the California Legislature in 1974 to address school attendance problems. Each county must maintain a SARB; county SARBs establish local SARBs, as necessary, to address the needs of students with attendance and related school behavior problems. According to the legislation, SARBs should specifically address the problems of habitual truants (those with three or more truancies during the school year). The auditors report said the lack of effectiveness of many SARBs was due to: weaknesses in the legislation, lack of interagency cooperation, absence of financial resources and lack of leadership by the State Department of Education.

Note, however, that not all SARBs are considered ineffective. One example: when 31 local SARBs in Los Angeles County were asked to evaluate their overall effectiveness for 1977-78, most Boards said they functioned in the 4-5 range on a scale of 1-5. In addition, most rated themselves 3, on a scale of 1-5, for providing services to students. The surveyed boards noted general frustration in handling more recalcitrant students as a result of lack of legal support and cooperation from the courts and law enforcement. Lack of support was attributed to legislative changes in the juvenile court laws.

Failure of the State Department of Education to perform its responsibilities. The state auditors charged that the State Department of Education failed to ensure full implementation of the state's compulsory attendance laws and attendance accounting procedures. Specifically, the auditors said the department's guidelines allowed for full apportionment if a student leaves school after once having been under the direct supervision of a certificated employee. However, they added, the state education code requires that credit should be given only for the time a student is "engaged in an educational activity and under the immediate supervision and control of a certificated employee." In other words, if students leave during the day unexcused, apportionment funds should not be claimed. Other responsibilities not being fulfilled by local districts, according to the auditors report, dealt with the use of unapproved attendance reporting systems, non-appointment of supervisors of attendance and non-recording of period attendance.

The auditors concluded that problems in administering attendance laws at the state level are reflected in the fact "that many school districts place a low priority on attendance functions. Numerous school districts do not notify parents on a daily basis that their child has been absent for a specific period or for the day."

Department officials disagreed with the strict interpretation of the state attendance law cited by the state auditors. They said the state education code was unclear about whether attendance should be taken on a once-daily or a period-by-period basis. They also noted that the auditors' request for more detailed school attendance records would be "extremely costly, increase paperwork and not cut down on student absences."

Outcome of the Auditors Report: The state auditing team recommended that the State Department of Education be required to submit to the legislature a comprehensive plan for addressing problems in administering the state's attendance laws and attendance accounting requirements. The legislature, impressed by the findings of the auditing team, wrote the requirement into law.

New York: Truancy Is Robbing the City

The New York State Senate Minority Task Force on Truancy charged in a March 1978 report that truancy and chronic absenteeism in the New York City public schools are "very real, critical and growing social problems."

The committee, under the leadership of State Senator Carl McCall, also charged that truancy and chronic absenteeism take an economic toll on the city in terms of high unemployment, especially among black youth who have dropped out of school; lost jobs; lost state aid; and potential swelling of the welfare rolls.

Truancy is a $72 million a year problem for New York City, the committee charged. It based its calculation on an average $4 daily loss in state aid multiplied by 180 days and by the number of daily absentees in the city schools (228,000). In its calculation, the committee allowed for an absentee rate of 10 percent because, it noted, this figure is considered a "normal" absentee rate by the New York State Department of Education. An improvement of one percent

in the attendance rate of the city schools, the committee claimed, would result in $5 million in additional state aid annually.

The attendance rate in the New York City Public Schools for 1975-76 averaged approximately 84 percent, the same rate as in 1970-71, according to the committee's figures. Curiously, the committee report lambastes the New York City Schools for their poor, although unchanged, average attendance rate, but it almost ignores a reported decline in the average attendance rate of the Syracuse schools from 95.2 percent in 1970-71 to 90.9 percent in 1975-76.

For the state as a whole, average attendance stood at 90.3 percent for 1970-71 and 1975-76. The only notable change was in the attendance rates reported for cities. The average attendance rate reported for kindergartens in all cities in the state rose from 87.7 percent in 1970-71 to 91.36. Grade 10-11 attendance in city schools also rose, from 80.69 percent to 85.32 percent. Attendance fell at all other grade levels among the city districts, with the most precipitous drop reported for grade 7-8 attendance — from 92.01 percent in 1970-71 to 86.24 percent in 1975-76.

The committee criticized the New York City Schools for several attendance-related practices. It noted, for example, that teachers in the district, through negotiated contract modifications, "shifted an important guidance function, i.e., the monitoring of school attendance, to a mechanical clerical effort." The United Federation of Teachers obtained a contract clause that teachers would be relieved of the duty of preparing postcards to parents of absentees and truant slips.

The committee also charged that the number of "attendance teachers" serving in the schools of the district was reduced by approximately 20 percent between 1974 and 1978, resulting in "impossible case loads, as high as 1,500 per attendance officer."

The committee report charged that cases of truancy and neglect are given an extremely low priority by the probation officers at family court who handle intake. It said the preventive services available within family courts are not utilized for children who come in as truants and, as a result, these children frequently return on more serious charges at a later time. (Police statistics put the cost of truancy-related youth crime in New York City in 1977 at $329 million annually.)

Most of the statistics in the New York senate report are quoted from other reports. However, committee members observed attendance procedures in 51 New York City schools and talked to more than 160 district and central office personnel. As a result, the report noted, committee members realized that high truancy rates "are not due to faulty procedures for locating and returning children to school but are the result of a basic attitude within the school system that 'problem' children cannot and will not be accommodated." The report continued: "Even when attendance procedures are adequate, children who leave school because the school has not met their needs are returned to the same situation with little chance of change." The schools "must make themselves flexible enough to teach all of the children in their charge," the report stated.

The report made these additional recommendations:

- That money be appropriated by the state to establish a categorical attendance improvement aid program that could be used for outreach, referral and appropriate education services for nonattending youth.
- That Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act) be speedily implemented because "a disproportionate number of truants suffer from handicapping conditions."
- That the New York City Board of Education make attendance of students a criterion in the evaluation of all teachers and administrators on a semester basis.
- That shortcuts be implemented for initiating truancy cases in New York courts.

Illinois: Recommendations For Truancy Reduction

In at least one state, Illinois, the governor vetoed legislation seeking support for evaluation and research on the state of truancy and dropout programs. The veto came in 1975, but the Illinois Office of Education decided to investigate on its own the prevalence of truancy and dropouts in the state.

The task force appointed by the state superintendent of public instruction presented its findings in September 1975. It estimated that on every day of the 1973-74 school year, 79,640 Illinois public school students were truant. They comprised 46 percent of all students absent from Illinois public schools.

Pupil absentee rates varied among districts — from just over 1 percent to almost 16 percent of enrollment. Only a few districts had more than a 10 percent absence rate. The Chicago schools had by far the greatest number of absentees per day of any school district in the state, but it did not have the highest absentee rate. Chicago's absence rate — 11.95 percent — was exceeded by six other districts with absence rates ranging from 12.4 percent to 15.83 percent. All six of the districts also exceeded Chicago's estimated truancy rate of 7.63 percent, with estimated truancy of up to 12 percent.

The state education agency reported that it had no aggregate data on dropouts.

A state spokesman interviewed for this report said the number of absences in Illinois peaked in 1973-74, dropped during the next two school years and started to increase again in 1976-77 and 1977-78. Figures for the 1978-79 school year were not available at press time.

Another report was prepared in 1977 by the Illinois Office of Education for the Joint Committee on Truancy and Student Discipline. All public school districts in the state were surveyed; almost 80 percent responded. The findings are contained in *Truancy and Student Attendance in Illinois Schools, 1976-77: A Survey Report*. Here's a summary:

- Truancy is typically a more frequently occurring problem in high schools, in urban schools and in large school distiicts.
- High school districts and unit districts (K-12) are much more likely to have written attendance policies and procedures for implementing the attendance policies than elementary districts.

Student Views

'I Didn't Like School Much'

When administrators are asked why students don't attend school and eventually drop out, they can cite many reasons: parental irresponsibility, student apathy, legislation that labels truants as "status offenders" and removes them from the jurisdiction of juvenile courts and lack of resources and personnel to aid all of the students who need extra help.

Students often have a different view. Here are some candid appraisals by former students who finally left school after following a path of non-attendance to the point of no return.

"I walked away from high school because what was being taught made no sense to me. Granted I was a confused kid, but school was totally impersonal. They were merely giving us 7th and 8th grade work, then stretching it out into a four-year review plan. Kids living in (town) at that time found high school too much of a clique experience. If you were from the wrong side of town, you were dubbed a country kid as opposed to a city kid."

Another student admitted: "I started cutting school in junior high. I got C's or better, but I didn't like it much. I never got caught. I was sly. I used to write phony admit slips back to class, and no one questioned it. A friend stole 500 of them, and lots of us used them for a long time."

Another former student: "There were eight of us at home; none of us graduated from high school. Mom was divorced three times. My father moved out of state when I was five. I started partying and thought school was a drag. I played sick a lot, forged notes. There were truant officers then, but I never met any. I'd intercept notes from school at the mailbox so my mother wouldn't get them. It worked out fine."

On the other hand, one student said she averted dropping out because she found a friend at school: "If I didn't have a vice principal who became my friend and believed that there were teachers who hated me because they had hated my older sister, I'd probably have dropped out altogether."

- Larger school districts (1,500 or more enrollment) are more likely to have written attendance policies and procedures for implementing attendance policies than are smaller districts (under 500 enrollment).
- Wide variability exists in school district identification of truants. Some districts identify any instance of an unexcused absence as truancy; in other districts, a student may accumulate 12 to 15 unexcused absences before being declared a truant. One-third of the estimated number of truants reported by districts were classified as "chronic truants."

Rates of truancy. The Illinois Office of Education projected that one-fourth of the high schools in the state had 5.11 percent or more of their enrollment classified as truants. One-fourth of the unit districts had 1.71 percent of their students similarly classified. In the elementary districts, the agency projected, the truancy rate was low. Three-fourths of them classified 0.49 percent or less of their enrollees as truant.

How do the districts respond to truancy? The Illinois results indicate that the four most frequently reported practices were, in rank order: contact by telephone with a parent or guardian (reported by 95 percent of responding districts); parent conferences (86 percent); in-school counseling of truants (72 percent); and parent notification of student absence by mail (67 percent). The fifth most often reported practice among elementary and unit districts was "truant officer visits to home of suspected truant." Suspension of truants was reported by 32 percent of all districts, with the highest rate (56 percent) reported by high schools.

A breakdown of the responses by community type indicates that more options for handling truancy are used by central city districts than by districts in rural, suburban or "independent cities." To illustrate: Referral of truants for special education services was reported by 56 percent of the districts in central cities, compared to 29 percent of suburban districts and 14 percent of rural districts. Similarly, truants were placed in alternative learning progams by 78 percent of central city districts, compared with 19 percent of suburban districts and only 3 percent of rural districts. Other options used much more by central city districts than by districts in other community settings include: visits to the home by an attendance officer, referral to community service agencies other than law enforcement, suspension and expulsion, special testing, work study progams, vocational programs, and options to attend schools in other attendance areas within the school district.

Clearly, the options available to a school district depend on size, location and availability of resources.

Use of legal actions. Responses to the Illinois survey indicate that high school districts use legal actions in proportionately greater numbers than do elementary or unit districts. These include: requesting the assistance of the state

attorney and of the police, and filing petitions against parents.

Respondents were asked to rate the assistance received from the judicial process. More than 40 percent rated it poor and 23 percent rated it fair. Only 20 percent rated it good or excellent. The respondents from the high school and unit districts, moreover, were most likely to rate the assistance as poor. "When one notes that these district types usually have the greatest incidence of truancy, these statistics seem especially telling," said the report.

Recommendations for changes. Respondents were asked to indicate what should be included in state policy or legislation concerning school attendance. Of five specific items listed on the survey, 61 percent of the respondents suggested the permissive policy of allowing schools to require parents to notify the school by telephone any day the student will be absent. More than half (56 percent) suggested a policy requiring schools to "keep accurate records of all unexcused absences of one-half day or more." Approximately 38 percent preferred this mandatory procedure: "Pupil absences must be reported by teachers each class period." Thirty-six percent opted for the mandatory procedure of requiring schools "to notify parents of an absence that has not been reported by the parents." Finally, almost one-third of the respondents wanted to require schools to keep records of unexcused absences on a quarterly basis.

Legislative or administrative changes. The final item in the Illinois survey is perhaps the most telling as far as school district attitude about truancy is concerned. An open-ended question asked what legislative or administative changes might assist schools in reducing truant behavior. Here, in rank order, is how the school district personnel responded:

1. *Regular attendance is a parental responsibility.* Students and parents must be held responsible. Mandatory fines for parents whose children do not attend school were strongly suggested.
2. *No more legislation is needed.* Most respondents felt the laws are adequate but are not being enforced. Respondents expressed great frustration with the state attorneys and judges for failure to apply the law. Some respondents said they no longer attempted to enforce compulsory attendance laws because there is so little support from the legal authorities.
3. *No more mandated progams or procedures are needed.* "Local districts are in the best position to know their own problems."
4. *The compulsory attendance law should be revised.* Respondents disagreed on the revisions, however. Some wanted to lower the school attendance age to 14, others to make attendance compulsory through the 8th grade. Some wanted to raise the school attendance age to 18, while others wanted to allow students the option of attending a two-year vocational or career oriented high school.
5. *A statewide definition of truancy is needed.*
6. *Alternative programs should be funded.*
7. *More funds should be provided for vocational education, truant officers, attendance officers and counselors.*
8. *A minimum number of days, exclusive of illness, should be set as one criterion for promotion.* A minimum attendance requirement should be established, after which a student loses credit for a course.
9. *Residential placement is needed.*
10. *A legal definition of an "excused absence" is needed.*
11. *A network of local services and community agencies should be established.*
12. *Regional superintendents should have legal authority to hold hearings with truant students and their parents.* Clearcut, reasonable penalities should be imposed for students and parents who fail to cooperate.
13. *Early prevention is needed.*

Connecticut Answers Senator's Query

In Connecticut, a state senator asked the State Department of Education to determine how many youth could be classified as "on the street and should be in school."

The state agency cautioned the senator in its February 1978 response that it had to depend on "incomplete and not entirely comparable" data. It noted, for example, that it only collects attendance data on October 1 and May 1 and that it questioned the reliability of some average absentee rates quoted by local school districts. The agency also told the senator that it did not collect information on students who drop out each year; that there is no statewide definition of "habitual truant"; and that it does not have good data on the number of students between the ages of 7 and 15 who are not enrolled in school.

Two other "unknowns" were also cited by the state agency. It said it had no figures on the number of students who were out of school and on the streets due to "open campus" policies used by some high schools, nor were there any figures available on the number of junior and senior high school students cutting one or more classes, but considered in attendance by their schools.

In answer to the senator's question, the best the state education department could do was guess.

The department's estimates: The state agency estimated the statewide truancy rate at between 0.5 and 1.0 percent. In other words, it said, about 6,000 to 7,000 out of 40,000 daily absentees from Connecticut schools are truant. On a yearly basis, it estimated, over one million student days are lost to truancy.

The state agency estimated that one out of every 10 absentees in elementary and suburban schools are unexcused and that one out of every four absences in secondary and urban schools are unexcused. The agency noted that students in Connecticut's three major cities comprise only about 11 percent of the student enrollment but may account for more than 20 percent of the absenteeism and more than 25 percent of the truancy.

The department does not gather specific information on the number of dropouts from the state's schools. It esti-

mated, however, that about 50,000 students graduate each year and that approximately 10,000 ninth-graders fail to graduate with their class.

In summary, the department told the senator, over 30,000 young people (including dropouts and graduates who are not working) are on the streets each day — "a highly visible group" — the department said.

Maine Focuses on Habitual Truants

The Maine Legislature passed a new law requiring school officials to keep better records on habitual truants and dropouts, starting in October 1977. It also set a minimum attendance requirement for all students, to be enforced through a loss of funds to a district for any students exceeding the limit. This requirement went into effect in the 1978-79 school year.

Absence is excusable in Maine for five reasons: personal illness, health appointments that cannot be made outside of the regular school day, recognized religious holidays, emergency family situations or planned absences for personal or educational purposes which have been approved in advance. Local districts determine what is acceptable as a planned absence for personal or educational purposes. The legislature requires specific documentation of unexcused absences, including record keeping of what steps were taken to determine the reason for the unexcused absences.

Extensive record keeping requirements were mandated for students labeled habitual truants. (In Maine, a habitual truant is a youth who is absent from school for five full days or for 10 half days within any six-month period, except for excused absences.) Documentation required for habitual truants includes written summaries of counseling sessions, results of physical examinations and psychological evaluations, written summaries of home visits and counseling sessions with school officials, written summaries of faculty discussions, written reports from any public or private agency which evaluates the child and of all efforts by the school to meet the child's educational needs and, finally, written recommendations by the principal and faculty to resolve the problem.

To assure that districts do their utmost to keep students in school, the legislature attached a minimum attendance provision to the law. It requires that each student attain a minimum 85 percent attendance rate, exclusive of sickness or other excused absences between October 1 and April 1 inclusive, to be counted for subsidy purposes.

As part of the same legislative package, school districts were given the authority to establish alternative programs for dropouts and chronic truants.

More recently, the Maine legislature amended the state's compulsory attendance law. It formerly required school attendance between the ages of 7 and 17. Students may now leave school at age 15 or at the completion of the 9th grade. Three provisions apply: Students must get the permission of their parents and of the local school committee (school board) and they must sign an agreement to meet at least once annually with district officials to review the possibility of return to regular day school or to evening school.

Are Maine administrators complying with the new requirements? "Most districts have a process in place," said an official of the Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services in an interview for this **Critical Issues Report.** "Administrators don't want to risk losing state aid," he added.

Los Angeles: Absenteeism Linked to Violence

A report prepared for the Los Angeles City Board of Education in March 1979 linked violent crime on school campuses with absentee students. The report, prepared by school district administrators, estimated that the majority of violent crimes on Los Angeles school campuses are caused by "young intruders" rather than by students attending classes.

"Many of these intruders," the report noted, "are youth who either are voluntarily out of class or who have been suspended or expelled or have dropped out of school. The problems which these intruders cause are not only related to violence but also to unacceptable forms of behavior, including use of drugs," the report continued.

Absenteeism within the Los Angeles City School District varies greatly from school to school. The percentage of absences for reasons other than illness ranged from 1.18 percent to 15.02 percent in senior high schools and from 1.46 percent to 10.73 percent in the junior high schools in the 1977-78 school year. Yet, the report noted, the overall averages were 4.88 percent absenteeism for senior high schools, 3.46 percent for junior high schools and 2.89 percent for elementary schools.

The Los Angeles district is plagued by absences of students who arrive on campus "more or less on time, but who do not attend classes," the report noted. Often, rather than leave the school, these students "spend the day loitering in halls and participating in illegal activities that sometimes lead to violent acts," said the report. "A significant number of absentees of this type congregate around schools to seek out their friends or acquaintances. Few of them have other interests or jobs, and few have any positive ties with the school community. Experience has shown," the report concluded, "that these young people often become potential sources of disruptive activity."

Los Angeles administrators admit in the report that the district should be doing more to help disruptive youth. Among the needs are: an adequate number of counselors at the elementary and secondary level; alternative programs for disruptive youth; curriculum development at individual schools to meet "the special needs, aspirations and goals" of young people; and career oriented programs for non-academically inclined students.

The report cited 89 recommendations for solving campus violence. Among them are the following:

- Each school should adopt clearcut attendance policies and procedures. Copies should be made available to students and parents.

- Each school should establish an attendance committee composed of teachers, students and parents to develop a program to make students and parents "attendance conscious" and to help students resolve individual attendance problems.
- Each school should develop a system through which the staff may communicate with parents prior to a student's third day of absence.
- Programs to serve students with severe attendance problems should be established in all areas of the district.
- Each school should be provided with a computerized system for the recording of pupil enrollment and daily attendance.
- School attendance audits should be made available to the public upon completion.

Rhode Island Analyzes Dropouts

An excellent analysis of the dropout situation in one state is provided by the Bureau of Research and Evaluation, Rhode Island Department of Education. The report, available for school years 1976-77 and 1977-78, was initiated by the state agency at the request of the board of regents.

The most recent edition of the report, which is entitled *Student Flow Survey, 1977-78*, provides valuable information about the characteristics of Rhode Island dropouts and dropout rates. The survey results are based on information received from secondary schools enrolling students in grades 7-12. Here are highlights:

- The 1977-78 dropout rate (number of dropouts 16 years old and over per 100 enrolled students at the same age group) was 10.6 percent.
- The dropout rate for males was 12.1 percent; for females, 9.1 percent.
- Nearly three-fourths of the dropouts are 16 or 17 years old.
- The proportion of dropouts below 16 years of age was highest for Hispanics, followed by blacks, whites and Portuguese.
- The male/female proportions were similar across race/ethnic groups: 56 percent male dropouts to 44 percent female dropouts.
- The number of dropouts was relatively small at grades 7 and 8, increasing more than four-fold between grades 8 and 9. Eight out of 10 dropouts were in grades 9, 10 or 11 when they left school.
- The "crude" dropout rates (rates that include dropouts at all ages) were higher for blacks and Hispanics than for whites and Portuguese at all grades.
- Based on the assumption that the crude dropout rates by grade will remain constant over time, for every 100 blacks entering 7th grade, 47 could be expected to drop out before graduating. In the Hispanic group, 45 would drop out before graduating. Among whites and Portuguese students, 25 would drop out before graduating.
- Among Asian Americans, Hispanics and Portuguese, the majority of dropouts were students whose dominant language was other than English.
- The two main reasons supplied by school personnel for students dropping out of school were: (1) "Decided to go to work," and (2) "Lack of interest in school." These two reasons were given by more than one-half of the dropouts.
- A total of 514 students reentered school in 1977-78 after having dropped out. (The total cannot be expressed as a percentage of those who left school early because students may return at any time.)
- Female dropouts seemed to return to school in higher proportions than males.

How about truants? As part of the *Student Flow Survey*, the Rhode Island Department of Education asked local districts to report the number of habitual truants.

More than one-half of the districts surveyed (18 out of 35) reported no truancy cases. Based on that information, the state agency decided not to prepare tables analyzing the characteristics of habitual truants. "It is very unlikely," it said, "that 18 districts had no truancy cases at all, and that 11 more districts had less than five truancy cases during the whole year." The agency also added this note: "Due to the lack of reliability of the data, the question of whether truants are forerunners of dropouts cannot be answered with assurance."

CHAPTER III

Why Do Students Stay Away from School?

The survey conducted for this **Critical Issues Report** asked AASA members this question: "What element of school and its total program has the most direct and significant bearing on attendance, and why?

In answering that open-ended question, slightly more than one out of every five respondents (22.4 percent) named the curriculum as the most significant element of the school program affecting attendance. When the responses were broken down by district size, the only respondents who did not put curriculum in first place were administrators in districts of 5,000 or fewer students. They named sports and extracurricular activities as the most significant element. Other elements mentioned by a high percentage of respondents were: teacher/staff attitude, teacher quality and student attitude.

More than a dozen other elements affect attendance, according to AASA members who participated in the survey. These elements are listed below in rank order, according to the percentage of times they were mentioned by all respondents:

- Parent attitude
- Student academic achievement
- Vocational programs
- Attendance policy
- Proper class placement
- Community attitude
- School atmosphere
- School-home relations
- Student motivation
- Home environment
- Alternative programs
- Counseling
- In-school discipline
- Peer pressure

AASA Critical Issues Report

Question 3:

What elements of school and its total program have the most direct and significant bearing on attendance, and why?

Ranking of Responses by District Size

Number of Students

	Under 5,000	5,001 to 10,000	10,001 to 25,000	More than 25,000
Student attitude		3		
Teacher/staff attitude	3	2	2	3
Teacher quality			3	2
Curriculum	2	1	1	1
Sports/Extra-curricular	1			

Ranking of Responses by Region

	Northeast	Southeast	Central	West
Teacher/staff attitude	1	2	3	
Teacher quality				3
Curriculum	3	1	1	1
Sports/Extra curricular	2	3	2	2

The number and variety of elements mentioned by respondents to the AASA survey indicate that student non-attendance is a complex issue. Respondents expressed both

puzzlement of and interest in the root causes of non-attendance. One administrator called for a study of "the attitudes of all concerned — because this is a people problem." Some indicated they would like to have a profile drawn of the typical truant and dropout; others wanted information on preventative measures and early identification of potential non-attenders.

Many of the comments from administrators related to curriculum. Specifically, administrators asked about "improved curriculum to help 'frustrated' students"; "curriculum improvement that meets the needs of today's students"; "educational adjustment programs for students who have attendance problems"; and "relevant" vocational programs.

Approximately 15 percent of the respondents said they needed in-depth information on legal and enforcement issues of student attendance. Some suggested that compulsory attendance legislation be reevaluated. Two comments in that area: "Can the compulsory attendance age be lowered?" "Why not eliminate it?"

Student issues: One administrator asked, "Is there a relationship between grades and attendance?" Another apparently concerned and frustrated superintendent wanted to know, "Why do bright students drop out?"

Many administrators indicated they see a link between the school's holding power and the student's background. "Absenteeism," said one, "is merely a result of a much larger problem: the decay of the family and the lack of parental authority." Another explained: "Because youth are guided by the behavior of their parents, we need a program to work with parents, one that would educate them of the importance of regular attendance."

What about the school? Some administrators noted in their responses to the survey that non-attendance may have more to do with the school than with the students. "Teachers may hold one critical key," said one respondent. He added: "Students are absent from one teacher's class more than they are from others." Another ventured: "Does poor attendance correlate with poor instruction?" A third wanted to know about techniques "to keep interest high, while teaching students at a level they can understand."

Teacher and staff attitudes were consistently identified by survey participants as having the most significant and direct bearing on student attendance. Nationally, 16.2 percent of all respondents listed it as a significant element. This comment by Harold Ellis, principal of Mount Vernon (Wash.) High School, was typical: "Teachers with com-

Relationship: School Attendance and Achievement

Repeated surveys and studies of influences on children's level of achievement have documented the relationship between low levels of achievement on the one hand and low levels of parent education, socioeconomic level, family income and membership in minority groups on the other. Some critics have charged that schools cannot alter the relationship. More recent research, however, challenges that conclusion.

Houston's findings: The importance of the relationship between attendance and achievement has been documented by many local school districts. One example: Administrators of the Houston Independent School District provided the school board and the public with a straightforward chart showing attendance rates for low achievers and high achievers in Houston's middle grades. The study provided the school board with the information it needed to strengthen the district's attendance policy.

Houston Independent School District

Class	Average Number of Absences	
	Lower 25% Iowa Test of Basic Skills	Higher 75% Iowa Test of Basic Skills
4th Grade 1976-77	13.5	9.8
5th Grade 1977-78	16.1	10.7
5th Grade 1976-77	14.2	9.7
6th Grade 1977-78	15.9	10.2

'Time on task' counts, too: Recent studies pinpoint the importance of "time on task," or the actual amount of time a student is engaged in an academic task. The Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study (BTES), sponsored by the National Institute of Education, noted a clear relationship between the amount of time children actually pay attention to the academic task and their academic success. BTES also found, however, that wide discrepancies existed in the amount of effective learning time within classrooms. In a study of second- and fifth-grade classrooms, for example, BTES found that absences, strikes, holiday activities and testing reduced the available learning time in a typical school year from 180 to 150 days.

The differences in actual learning time among classrooms at the same grade level were as great as 100 percent, BTES researchers discovered. Two factors that diminished the available time, the researchers found, were (1) time spent when students were not organized and moved efficiently from one learning activity to another and (2) too many student behavior problems. BTES researchers concluded that regular school attendance improves achievement — provided classroom time is spent on actual learning tasks.

Indifference, Neglect of Early Warning Signs Charged

One state official interviewed for this **Critical Issues Report** criticized schools and administrators for their indifference to attendance matters. He attributed some of the indifference to lack of adequate personnel to cope with truancy and attendance matters. At the same time, however, he noted that declining enrollment has left some schools with extra personnel who could be trained to help with attendance. "It is short sighted of teachers and their unions to insist that attendance is not one of their duties when it is, in fact, the basis for their bread and butter," he noted.

Another reason for indifference cited by the state official is the state funding formula. The official noted that the law in his state permits districts to claim full aid for any student who is in school the period that attendance is taken. Thus, he said, "administrators don't get too excited if the kids leave during the next period." Other school attendance personnel noted, however, that faculty members sometimes are unclear about student attendance requirements.

Indifference to attendance also can be an indication of other problems, the state official said. He noted that a common complaint among district officials is lack of adequate alternatives to serve students who do poorly in regular programs. "Not all kids fit into an academic niche," he said. "There should be career and vocational alternatives, and they should be as highly regarded as the academic courses."

Another complaint is often expressed in these words: "We need some teeth in compliance — some way to force the parents to assure their kids come to school." Some administrators say, too, that "forces beyond their control" are affecting truancy rates. One school official noted, for example, that "forces such as drugs contribute to truancy, distort kids' personalities, make them lazy 'upstairs' and uncaring of school attendance."

Some school officials and attendance personnel admit that attendance taking procedures violate the spirit, if not the letter of attendance laws. One official said, for example, that schools in his state could not receive aid for any students excused illegally. Consequently, if a student asked to be excused for an illegal reason (e.g., to baby-sit, to go shopping, to go on a job interview), some teachers would in effect turn their backs on the student and ignore the request. "If the student decided to leave," said the attendance official, "the teacher would claim to not know the whereabouts of the student, and the district would receive aid for the student that day."

Another transgression of attendance laws may occur, attendance officials observed, when a student is absent for a long period of time. As long as the student is carried on the rolls, but no one knows why he is absent, the district can claim aid, an official noted. "If, however, you check and find out the student has moved from the area or has no intention of returning, the student must be taken off the rolls and no aid claimed."

A major problem appears to be that of finding ways for elementary schools to deal with absenteeism very early in a child's school career. Statistics show that generally, attendance is highest in the elementary grades; it dips downward starting at about 7th grade and is lowest in the senior high grades and kindergarten. Some administrators have noted, however, that students who are "in trouble in later school years" often have histories of poor school attendance in early grades. A common recommendation of attendance personnel is that identification and remediation of students with high absentee rates is a must by no later than the 3rd or 4th grade. One attendance official said administrators know that intervention must come early to be effective. "Age 15 or 16 is too late," the official concluded.

mitment and sensitivity to making contact with students have fewer attendance problems."

Another principal, John Hoback of Boulder (Colo.) High School, has successfully used a parent-teacher-school contract to improve student attendance. But he doesn't credit the contract idea exclusively for improved attendance. "Even a well organized program can be burdened with truancy problems if a vital component is missing — the student must be given a feeling of being needed and wanted," Hoback said. "If the student feels that his presence doesn't really matter to anyone but himself, then he probably won't care sometimes whether he attends even a well-presented session."

What the PTA found: The national PTA organization found in completing its attendance improvement project in five states that poor student attendance was related to the following items:

- Poor teacher attendance.
- Low achievement.
- Little involvement in enrichment and extracurricular programs.
- Family winter vacations.
- Mondays and Fridays.
- Lack of gym clothes for gym class days.
- Students driving to high school.
- Poor winter weather.
- Upper-grade students.

What Does Research Say?

The relationship between school influences, especially curriculum, and attendance is poorly researched. Recent research efforts tend to support administrators' observations that students' interest in subject matter and their perception of its relevancy affect attendance rates.

Research — Course Structure and School Size: John S. Wright, in research conducted for his 1976 doctoral thesis at the University of Virginia, found that better attendance rates in Virginia high schools were positively related to the percent of course requirements offered students in short-term electives. Wright noted that he failed to find a positive relationship between the number and scope of elective offerings. He did find, however, that attendance rates decreased as the size of the school increased. (The larger high schools studied offered a greater number and variety of electives than smaller schools.)

Research — Curriculum: How curriculum materials are presented to students makes a difference, concluded Layman E. Allen and Dana B. Main in their 1976 study of the use of mathematics games to increase student involvement, participation and motivation. The researchers found absenteeism three times higher in control groups than in the math-game classes and also noted that when students transferred from a math games class to a control class, absenteeism doubled for these students.

Another study, completed by Mildred B. Roberts in 1971, found that the use of curriculum materials and approaches which emphasize student success can improve attendance. The use of a success-oriented science curriculum, Roberts found, produced significant gains in attendance.

Truant-Gate

Life Is More Interesting Than School

Why do bright students skip class? That's a puzzle frustrating more than one administrator who responded to the Critical Issues Survey. One unrepentant former truant suggests this answer: Many students find life a lot more interesting and real than high school.

The confirmed chronic truant graduated — barely — from Blair High School, Silver Spring, Md., in 1961. He returned as the commencement speaker in 1979. His name? Carl Bernstein, one of the two investigative reporters for the *Washington Post* who cracked the Watergate story.

"My own graduation from Blair is a memory so vivid that I continue to have nightmares about it," Bernstein told the 1979 graduates. "I was never able to send out invitations and those little white cards with your name engraved in script because Mr. Adelman, with good reason, had refused to pass me in chemistry. And I was also flunking gym.

"The explanation has less to do with my scores on tests or physical dexterity than with the fact that I wasn't in class very often. In those days we had a free fourth period to work on the school paper, *Silver Chips*, of which I was circulation and exchange manager. That free period would be spent at the pool hall on Thayer Avenue. Somehow the fourth period stretched into the fifth and sixth, which was the same time I was supposed to be in gym and chemistry classes.

"I was also working evenings at the time. I started as a copyboy for a newspaper, and that seemed to be a lot more interesting than doing homework at night. So when it came time to order caps and gowns in 1961, the principal told me not to bother. There followed some intense lobbying by me and my parents. And there was a big discussion among members of the faculty, who finally decided to get me out of Blair rather than put up with me for another year. The night before graduation, the principal called my parents with news of dispensation. The Bernstein family escaped disgrace, at least for a little while."

Bernstein revealed that he managed to get accepted at the University of Maryland, periodically was flunked out for failing to show up for classes and finally was suspended for acquiring too many parking tickets.

The prize-winning reporter didn't recommend that students emulate him. His point, he said, was this: "Your life isn't over if you're not at the top of the class. The die isn't cast yet; the final score isn't in. The real world is a lot more tolerant, a lot more interesting, a lot more fun, a lot more sensible, really, than the cocoon that is high school. Wherever you stand in this class, you've gotten through the worst part — high school — and you deserve to feel really good about that.

"Now come the opportunities, whether you're headed for a university, a job, the military, marriage. Now you get to be your own person, not what your teachers want you to be, not what your parents expect you to be. At last, you're not going to be compelled by others to do anything. That piece of paper — that diploma — is a ticket out of this place and into life. Life isn't like high school. Enjoy it," Bernstein advised the Blair High graduates.

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Research — Teaching Style: Stanford Research Institute (SRI) documented the relationship between various teaching styles and student attendance. Margaret Needels presented the results of the SRI studies to the American Educational Research Association at its 1975 annual meeting. She reported that higher attendance rates were found in first and third grade classrooms in which teachers and teacher aides provided individualized attention, especially personalized reading instruction; when teachers asked open-ended questions and were responsive to students; and, in third grade, when students were allowed more independence. Higher absence rates were found in classrooms where children were not interacting but, instead, were listening to or observing a teacher's presentation.

Research — Classroom Climate: A study reported by Rudolph Moos and Bernice S. Moos in a 1978 issue of the *Journal of Educational Psychology* compared achievement and absences in 19 classrooms at a single high school. The researchers found clear correlations between average class grades and absentee rates and the classroom climate. Classroom climate was defined by teachers and students in terms of level of involvement, affiliation, teacher support, task orientation, competition, organization, teacher control, innovations and clarity of rules. Classes with the highest absentee rates were viewed by teachers and students as more competitive, having a higher level of teacher control and a lower degree of teacher support.

Research — Contracts, Rewards, Threats: A 1976 study by Christopher Grala and Clark McCauley told of a combination of threats and positive reinforcements to induce inner-city truants in Philadelphia to attend classes. Grala and McCauley found that students would agree to return to school when they were warned about the consequences of truancy. Improved student attendance rates did not occur, however, unless positive supportive instruction was also provided.

In 1975, Ronald R. Morgan tried three types of positive reinforcement to induce Chicano youth in Tempe, Ariz., elementary schools to improve their attendance. Morgan found that positive reinforcement — by peers, by teachers or through material rewards — helped all treatment groups significantly improve their attendance.

B. David Brooks, principal of a California high school, reported in 1974 that he successfully used contingency contracts in improving attendance among truants. Students were given bonus tickets for a lottery when they could obtain positive written comments from their teachers. Brooks suggested that this practice may have been effective in nurturing more positive teacher attitudes toward the truant students, thus improving the teacher's relationship with the students. That, in turn, Brooks said, may have helped improve student attendance. Students participating in the experiment said they liked the contracts because they knew exactly what was expected of them and what would happen if they followed the agreement, Brooks concluded. The rewards for students who complied with their contracts ranged from cash, records and concert tickets to free time, such as a day off from school with parent and school permission. Free time also proved an effective reward for promoting good attendance.

Research — Sports and Extracurricular Activities: The category, sports and extracurricular activities, was consistently included among the three most frequently identified elements of the school program having a direct and significant positive bearing on school attendance by administrators responding to the **Critical Issues Survey**. Nationally, 17 percent of all respondents said sports and extracurricular activities greatly influence attendance rates. Research identifying characteristics common to dropouts and truants support their observation.

Few dropouts have ever been involved in more than one extracurricular activity or in the school's sports program. Research is lacking, however, on whether increasing the variety of extracurricular activities or enticing students with high absentee rates into participation in sports and extracurricular activities would promote improved attendance. So far, research has merely noted the degree of student involvement before and after attendance was improved through other approaches. Findings usually show that improved attendance, higher achievement and increased involvement in extracurricular activities go hand in hand.

Research — Alternative Programs: Many district evaluation reports and a few research studies are turning up remarkable success stories for alternative programs in terms of improved teacher and student morale, higher achievement levels, better parent and community rapport and decreased absentee and dropout rates. Hard research data on alternative schools' effectiveness, however, are still limited, partly because the phenomenon of alternative programs is barely more than a decade old.

The Ford Foundation report, *Matters of Choice*, which looked at operating alternative schools, concluded: "Where standard measures of achievement such as test scores and college admissions are applicable, they show that alternative school students perform at least as well as their counterparts in traditional programs and usually better. Attendance rates, almost without exception, exceed those in regular schools."

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) in its research report, *Alternative Schools*, identified alternative programs operating in about one-fourth of a representative sample of its member school districts. NSBA found that alternative schools were not universally successful.

The NSBA publication pointed out, moreover, that labeling a program "alternative" does not make it so. "It should be noted that schools for special purposes, to which students are assigned, i.e., schools for discipline problems, for pregnant students, for returned dropouts, are *not* alternative schools since, from the student or parent perspective, there is no option," NSBA said.

NSBA sketched a "success formula" for alternative programs gleaned from its study of successful and unsuccessful programs in local schools. The three key requirements, NSBA concluded, are planning, community input and flexibility.

While the emphasis on flexibility has produced a wide variety of approaches, curriculum offerings, classroom settings and structures, most alternative programs are characterized by less formal instructional patterns and class group-

ings, more personalized interaction between students and teachers and more emphasis on improving students' self-image and sense of responsibility.

A study by Stanford University researchers of 18 alternative programs for truants and dropouts in California concluded that the way teachers treated students made a significant difference in how often students showed up for class. Alternative school teachers, the researchers noted, differed significantly from teachers in traditional school settings in how they related to students. They took their authority less seriously, gave students more responsibility for conflict resolution, saw behavior problems as opportunities to work with students and, as a group, exhibited a greater degree of patience, sensitivity, sincere interest and humor, the study found.

Research — Teacher and Staff Attitudes: *Kids Don't Learn from People They Don't Like*, contend David Aspy and Flora Roebuck of the National Consortium for Humanizing Education. That's also the title of their book, which details the results of 13 years of research. The co-authors say students not only learn more from people they like, but they miss fewer days of school when they believe that their teachers are treating them with consideration, fairness and respect.

Aspy and Roebuck's book includes the results of their program to teach teachers effective interpersonal skills. The pair found that teachers with poor mastery of interpersonal skills actually retard student learning and create an unpleasant environment, which many students avoid through absence. In contrast, teachers who scored high on mastery of interpersonal skills were more effective teachers, and their classrooms had higher attendance rates, Aspy and Roebuck found.

When 181 New York State dropouts were asked what they didn't like about school, they cited three things: some of the teachers, a particular course and authority and rules. The dropouts were interviewed as part of the "Statewide Youth Advocacy Project" of the New York Civil Liberties Union. The findings, conclusions and recommendations of the project are found in *Failing Students and Failing Schools*.

In describing the "ideal" school, the New York State dropouts most frequently said it would have "nice" teachers. The dropouts identified a "nice teacher" as "one who cares about students and who helps students with their school work." Even when the dropouts mentioned other factors such as more alternatives, job-oriented courses or individualized instruction, their comments usually included some reference to teacher or staff attitudes.

CHAPTER IV

Dropouts

National interest in and federal support for dropout prevention peaked in the early 1970s. At that time, the arguments for and against dropout prevention programs focused mainly on economic issues. One well publicized report released in 1972 by the Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity estimated that the national bill for failing to adequately educate all American youth exceeded $78 billion annually. The committee's estimate was based on the projected costs for lost tax revenues from high school dropouts age 25-34 ($71 billion), welfare and unemployment ($3 billion) and crime and crime prevention ($3 billion).

The committee's report did not include several significant costs associated with failure to attend or complete school. Some examples: the cost to youth themselves in terms of lower lifetime earnings; the cost to school districts in terms of lost revenues; and the cost to school districts and citizens for that portion of vandalism, burglary and other crimes which can be attributed to out-of-school youth.

The committee mentioned several other detrimental effects of dropping out of school: reduced political participation, poorer health and adverse motivation.

In more recent years, some educators question the validity of insisting on 12 years of schooling for every individual. The national dropout prevention campaign, some said, made life more difficult for youth who left school early by labeling them failures and elevating the high school diploma to the status of an admission card to the world of work.

The value or necessity of compulsory schooling was examined from a different perspective by other individuals, study groups and national bodies. A notable report issued in 1973 by one group, the National Commission on the Reform of Secondary Education, recommended that the formal school-leaving age be reduced to age 14. The commission's rationale was this: "If the high school is not to be a custodial institution, the state must not force adolescents to attend. Earlier maturity — physical, sexual and intellectual — requires an option of earlier departure from the restraints of formal schooling."

As part of the commission's recommendations, it noted that other programs should accommodate those who wish to leave school, and employment laws should be rewritten to assure on-the-job training in full-time service and work. The commission's recommendations have not been implemented for the most part, although similar recommendations surface occasionally.

Update: Dropping Out and Employment/Income

One federally funded study completed in 1971 by Jerald G. Bachman and others of the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research found family background and ability more reliable predictors of unemployment than high school completion. Bachman noted at the same time, however, that unemployment rates were twice as high for dropouts as for youth who stayed in school. His conclusions were based on a longitudinal study of one school age group. He contended that dropping out is a symptom of other family, socioeconomic, cultural or personal problems rather than a problem in itself. "The overall impression to be gained from the data," Bachman said, "is that dropping out does not change things a great deal — at least not in ways that are apparent by the time a young man reaches the age of 19 or 20."

A more recent and more ambitious study, which followed the progress of a group of 16 to 19 year olds into their mid-20s, challenges Bachman's conclusions. Arvil Adams, Garth L. Mangum and others reported the results of their seven-year study in the 1978 publication, *The Lingering Crisis of Youth Unemployment*. The study was sponsored

by the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research and the U.S. Department of Labor.

Education, measured by years of school completed, leads to more weeks worked per year, higher hourly wages and significantly higher earnings, Adams and Mangum found. Greater economic and job experience successes were recorded for youth who either stayed in school or were continuously employed after dropping out.

"Unemployment of out-of-school youth has a 'hangover' effect that puts these youth at a lifelong disadvantage in the labor market," Adams and Mangum concluded. They noted that black male dropouts and black and white female dropouts were most seriously affected by adverse early labor market experiences. Adams and Mangum, both professors of economics, found that not only does the dropout group never catch up with high school graduates in employment rates and earning levels, but dropouts fall further behind as they age.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES
Recent High School Graduates And Recent Dropouts

		High School Graduates	Dropouts
1977	total	14.7%	26.6%
	whites	12.5%	23.7%
	blacks	39.4%	41.6%
1978	total	13.8%	23.7%
	whites	10.3%	27.6%
	blacks*	40.1%	32.4%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, June 1978, and unpublished data, June 1979.

* Note: Anne McDougall Young, economist for the Office of Current Employment Analysis, Bureau of Labor Statistics, says the apparent higher unemployment rate for black 1978 graduates, compared to 1977 graduates, is not statistically significant.

Lifetime Income Estimates for Males

Level of Schooling	Lifetime Income
8th grade	$343,730
High school, 1-2 years	$389,208
High school, 4 years	$478,873
College, 4 years	$757,923

U.S. Department of Commerce estimates, 1976

Dropouts: How Many?

Not quite one out of every three respondents to the **Critical Issues Survey** cited "early dropouts" as a problem. The problem was cited more often by administrators of large districts. Almost 56 percent of administrators of districts of more than 25,000 students cited early dropouts as a problem, compared with approximately 24 percent of the administrators of small districts (under 5,000 students).

The survey did not try to find out from district administrators how many students leave school early. One reason: The statistical information for school dropouts is even muddier than it is for absentee students.

Some school districts count all students who have disappeared from the school roll books for any reason except graduation and label the total "early leavers." Others use a two-part process to determine the number of dropouts. First, they subtract the 12th grade graduation total from the 1st, 5th, 9th, 10th or 11th grade enrollment total. Then, they deduct the number of students who have transferred to another school system. Other districts count as dropouts only those specifically identified as officially withdrawn from school, either at all grade levels, or only at the high school level, or at the high school and junior high levels. A few districts include in their dropout total all missing students, even those they cannot identify as having officially withdrawn or transferred. And a few districts just don't try to count them at all.

Government agencies use as many different methods of counting dropouts as local schools: the difference between the school-age population and school enrollment, the difference between enrollment for the same age group at different grade levels, and household sampling surveys of each age group population.

Some of the dropouts from school drop back into education in a different form. They may complete requirements for a diploma while serving in the armed forces, return to night school or study on their own to obtain an equivalency diploma.

Is the number of school dropouts increasing? Yes. No. Maybe. The answer depends on who is counting, who is counted and how the count is taken. It may also depend on where the count is taken. Big city schools have been particularly troubled by rising dropout rates.

The view that the dropout rate is increasing is suggested by data gathered by HEW's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). In *Statistics of Public Elementary and Secondary Day Schools, 1977-78 School Year (Final)*, the federal agency computes school retention rates by comparing the ratio of high school graduates to 9th-grade enrollment four years earlier. Here's what the NCES report shows:

School Year	Graduates	Dropouts
1970-71	77.8%	22.2%
1975-76	75.1%	24.9%
1976-77	74.6%	25.4%

Another suggestion that the dropout rate is increasing comes from the U.S. Census Bureau. It reports small increases in the percentage of youth, age 14-21, who are not enrolled in school and who do not have a high school diploma. Its findings (detailed in *Population Characteristics: School Enrollment – Social and Economic Characteristics of Students*, April 1979 and March 1978):

Percentage of Youth Not Enrolled in School Who Do Not Have a Diploma

Age Group	October 1978	October 1977
14-15 years	1.6%	1.4%
16-17 years	8.8%	8.6%
18-19 years	16.7%	16.6%
20-21 years	16.0%	15.7%

Note: Census officials say the increases from 1977 to 1978 in the percentage of youth out of school without a diploma (shown above) are too slight to be significant. But it is important to note that this is the first time an increase has been shown in recent years. Moreover, surveys of 16-24 year olds by the Dept. of Labor and others suggest that the estimated percentages for youth not enrolled in school and who do not have a diploma are, if anything, too low.

Anne McDougall Young, an economist for the Office of Current Employment Analysis, Bureau of Labor Statistics, estimates there are approximately 5 million youth, age 16-24, who are not enrolled in school and who do not have a high school diploma.

A more in-depth look at Young's findings shows an increase in recent years in the pool of youth, age 16-24, who are out of school without a diploma, as follows:

1973	4,721,000
1974	4,847,000
1976	4,981,000
1977	5,031,000
1978	5,113,000

On an annual basis, well over three-quarters of a million youth, age 14 to 24, leave school without a diploma. The following breakdown by age group was compiled by Young:

Number of Youth Who Left School Without a Diploma During the School Year

Year	14-15 year olds	16-24 year olds
1971-72	112,000	730,000
1973-74	125,000	805,000
1976-77	79,000	820,000
1977-78	(not available)	822,000

In reviewing dropout statistics, it is necessary to keep in mind the tremendous increase in the percentage of youth who are enrolled in school, compared with earlier decades. In 1976, for example, almost 91 percent of the nation's 17 year olds were enrolled, compared with 86.3 percent in 1970, 75.6 percent in 1960 and 68.2 percent in 1950.

Increasing Dropout Rates In Washington State

At least one state — Washington — has comprehensive data showing substantial increases in the number and percent of dropouts over a 15-year period.

Washington's dropout rate for 1976-77 represented a 68 percent increase over the 1962-63 rate. The number of dropouts increased from 7,445 or 3.93 percent of year-end enrollment in 1962-63 to 13,390 or 5.41 percent in 1970-71. By 1976-77, the number of dropouts had risen to 16,978. They represented 6.61 percent of Washington State's grade 9-12 year-end enrollment.

At the close of each school year, every school district in the state reports the number of pupils in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12 who drop out during the school year. The figures include only those who quit school. They do not include transfers to other schools. The Washington State Department of Education determines school-year dropout rates for each of 39 counties and for the state.

The actual dropout rate for the state is higher than the official figures show. The reason: Students who fail to return after the summer are not counted.

For the state as a whole, the dropout rate was highest in 1976-77 at the 11th grade level. The 5,339 dropouts represented 8.32 percent of year-end enrollment for that grade. The next highest rate (7.70 percent) was recorded for 12th grade students.

The 15-year figures indicate another disturbing trend: The biggest increase in the percent of students dropping out is shown for 9th and 10th graders. To illustrate: In 1962-63, dropouts represented 1.94 percent of the year-end 9th grade enrollment and 4.27 percent of the year-end 10th grade enrollment. The 1976-77 rates of 3.41 percent 9th grade dropouts and 7.33 percent 10th grade dropouts represent increases of 76 and 72 percent, respectively.

Who Drops Out?

An extensive study of youth, conducted by Delbert S. Elliott and Harwin L. Voss and released in book form (*Delinquency and Dropout*), provided substantial data on the identification of dropouts. The two researchers gathered data on 2,617 subjects in California junior and senior high schools between 1963 and 1967.

The strongest predictors of dropout, the researchers said, were: academic failure, school "normlessness" and social isolation, exposure to dropout in the home and commitment to peers, whether male or female.

Dropping out is related to class, the researchers said. "Lower class" youth, they said, are more likely to experience isolation in school and have more exposure to dropouts in the home. In most instances, the researchers found, the immediate stimulus for voluntary dropouts was difficulty or crisis in the school, typically a conflict with a teacher resulting in a temporary suspension.

The researchers identified three types of dropouts: involuntary, educationally handicapped and capable. They said that almost two-thirds (66 percent) were capable of completing high school. Most of these left school voluntarily, and only about 20 percent were forced to leave school by administrative order because of troublesome behavior. Almost one-third of the dropouts (32 percent) were "educationally handicapped," the researchers concluded.

Some states and some school districts have drawn on research findings such as those of Elliott and Voss to piece together a profile of dropouts as an aid in the early identification of potential dropouts.

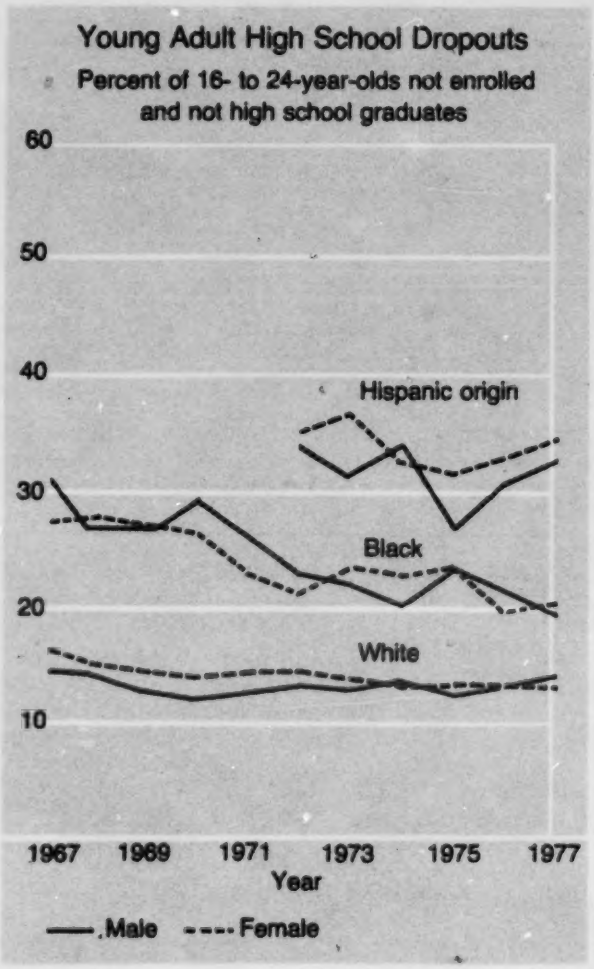
An extensive profile currently is used by the Denver Public Schools. It lists 17 general characteristics of dropout students. "Obviously," the district notes, "not all dropouts possess all of these characteristics and conversely, some pupils who exhibit some of these characteristics do not drop out of school." The profile is as follows:

General Characteristics of Dropout Students

- Tend to be more mobile than other students.
- Tend to come from low-income families.
- Exhibit discipline problems in school.
- Have a high rate of absenteeism or truancy.
- Have average or slightly below average intelligence.
- Tend to be low and under achievers, academically.
- Do not read at grade level.
- Fail more grades than their peers.
- Feel rejected by, and reject, the school.
- Do not participate in extracurricular activities.
- Have frequent health problems.
- Tend to have more personal problems, usually exhibited by behavioral problems or social withdrawal.
- Are usually "loners" and generally are not accepted by their peers.
- Communication between home and school is usually poor.
- One or more of the parents did not finish school.
- An older brother or sister is a dropout.
- Friends are outside of the school, usually older dropouts.

Another profile can be gleaned from information compiled by the Rhode Island Department of Education and compiled in a report entitled *Student Flow Survey, 1977-78*. Here's a summary:

- Age: The peak age for leaving school is 16. Students who decide to leave school during the summer most likely are age 15 or younger.
- Dropouts over age 16 are more apt to be male than female.
- The dropout is most likely in the 9th grade. Dropout rates are highest then, followed by 8th and 10th grades. However, students who are below the grade appropriate for their age are more likely to drop out of school than students who follow the normal pattern of promotion.
- The dropout is likely to belong to a minority racial/ethnic group.
- Language problems may be a significant factor contributing to the dropout count.
- Those who decide to reenter school after having left tend to be young (15.7 years is the mean age) and female. They usually reenter grade 10 or 11. The main reason students give for reentering: "Want more education."



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Persons not enrolled in school and not high school graduates, by age, racial/ethnic group, and sex: 1967 to 1977

Item	Percent of population, not enrolled in school and not high school graduates			
	Total, 16 to 24 years old	16 and 17 years old	18 and 19 years old	20 to 24 years old
1967				
White male	14.7	7.0	15.4	18.8
White female	16.1	9.4	16.3	19.0
Black male	30.8	11.8	30.7	42.6
Black female	26.9	14.7	22.0	36.1
1968				
White male	14.4	6.9	14.3	18.9
White female	15.0	7.6	14.6	18.5
Black male	27.1	10.1	23.8	39.7
Black female	27.6	14.2	24.7	35.9
1969				
White male	12.6	6.8	12.6	15.9
White female	14.6	8.8	14.2	17.3
Black male	25.9	10.2	31.5	34.7
Black female	26.6	11.5	23.1	35.7
1970				
White male	12.2	6.3	13.3	14.8
White female	14.1	8.4	14.8	16.3
Black male	29.4	13.3	36.4	35.4
Black female	26.6	12.4	26.6	33.5
1971				
White male	12.6	6.4	14.2	15.1
White female	14.2	8.6	13.8	16.7
Black male	25.5	9.4	26.0	34.2
Black female	22.1	9.2	22.5	28.2
1972				
White male	13.0	7.8	13.5	15.3
White female	14.2	9.6	13.2	16.6
Black male	22.3	9.4	27.1	27.2
Black female	20.8	7.6	21.0	27.3
Hispanic origin male	33.4	11.7	35.5	44.4
Hispanic origin female	35.0	19.3	25.9	44.3
1973				
White male	12.5	8.7	14.1	13.7
White female	13.3	9.2	15.2	14.2
Black male	21.6	10.6	27.7	24.9
Black female	22.9	10.0	23.0	29.0
Hispanic origin male	30.7	12.6	32.9	38.2
Hispanic origin female	36.4	22.8	40.5	41.6
1974				
White male	13.4	9.4	17.4	13.6
White female	13.1	9.1	13.9	14.5
Black male	20.1	8.3	26.9	23.6
Black female	22.3	12.6	20.2	27.7
Hispanic origin male	33.8	19.6	35.1	40.4
Hispanic origin female	32.3	20.8	25.1	40.3
1975				
White male	12.9	7.3	13.7	13.4
White female	13.2	9.6	15.6	13.6
Black male	22.8	9.7	27.7	27.9
Black female	22.8	10.7	23.4	28.4
Hispanic origin male	26.6	11.1	26.3	35.9
Hispanic origin female	31.5	15.5	33.5	38.6
1976				
White male	13.2	7.6	17.1	14.1
White female	13.3	9.1	15.4	14.1
Black male	21.2	8.1	19.3	29.6
Black female	19.7	10.8	20.7	23.5
Hispanic origin male	30.2	13.3	32.0	38.6
Hispanic origin female	32.3	17.7	29.5	40.4
1977				
White male	13.9	8.6	17.0	14.9
White female	12.8	9.1	14.8	13.5
Black male	19.4	6.9	23.8	24.3
Black female	20.8	8.4	20.3	25.1
Hispanic origin male	31.5	9.9	33.7	41.7
Hispanic origin female	34.2	20.9	31.8	41.2

Minority Youth

In 1977, approximately one out of every seven white youth, age 16-24, was not enrolled in school and was not a high school graduate. By contrast, one out of every five black youth in the same age group, whether male or female, had left school without a diploma. The dropout rate for youth of Hispanic origin was highest — approximately one out of every three youth in the 16-24 age group.

The 10-year comparison chart shows a tremendous reduction in the dropout rate for black male and female youth. It fell appreciably in the early 1970s levelling off in later years. In contrast, the dropout rate among white young adults has not declined significantly in 10 years.

The dropout rate for Hispanic youth has not change much in the five years that separate statistics have been kept. In 1977, approximately one Hispanic youth out of every three did not complete high school requirements by the age of 24. Male and female youth of Hispanic origin were leaving school in 1977 at approximately the same rate black males left school 10 years earlier.

Students Who Fall Behind

Students who fall behind their classmates drop out more readily than those who do not. They may, for example, be two or more years below grade level in reading and math. Or they may fail one or more grades. In either case, they are more apt to drop out than other students.

NCES says more students currently are enrolled at the appropriate or modal grade for their age than a decade or two ago. It notes, for example, that 26 percent of 15 year olds were enrolled below modal grade in 1950. By 1976, only 10 percent of 15 year olds were enrolled below the modal grade.

The progress rates of black and Hispanic children do not match those of their white counterparts. In other words, many more of them have failed to pass one or more grades. The differences are more pronounced for older youth, 14 to 17 years old, the ages when most youth drop out. In 1977, NCES statistics show, almost 7 percent of black youth and over 9 percent of Hispanic 14 to 17 year olds were enrolled below their modal grade compared to 3.5 percent of all students in that age group. Students who are enrolled below modal grade tend to come from families in the lowest income groups, and their parents often do not have a high school education. The latter two factors — low income and low education level of parents — also are used to predict which students are most likely to drop out.

Schools began to change their philosophy about the widsom of retaining students who failed to meet academic standards over the 25-year period, 1950 to 1975. As more students were more readily promoted, however, charges of "social promotion" were heard. Those charges, combined with others, led to a call for minimum competency standards.

By January 1979, according to the Education Commission of the States in Denver, 36 states had initiated some kind of activity in minimum competency testing. At that

time, only three states were using or planning to use the tests as a basis for promoting students from grade to grade, and 17 states intended to use the standards as a requirement for high school graduation.

Because the minimum competency standards are so new, it is not known if they will result in a rise in the number of students enrolled below modal grade or a rise in the number of students who drop out because they fail to pass minimum competency tests. Both of those predictions have been heard. On the other hand, some educators argue that the standards will cause schools to identify "problem" learners earlier in their school careers and to provide the remedial help that would enable them to catch up with their peers.

Pregnant Teen-Agers

Pregnancy remains the leading cause of dropping out among female students. About one million adolescent girls — nearly one in 10 — conceive each year, and 600,000 young women carry their pregnancies to full term. About 94 percent keep their babies. Another 400,000 teen-age pregnancies are terminated by miscarriage or abortion. An estimated 400,000 pregnant teens are under 17 years of age, and 30,000 are under age 15.

The birthrate among the youngest mothers — those who are 10 to 14 years old — is climbing, contrary to all other national birthrate trends. While the birthrate for all older teens has declined steadily since 1960, it still remains higher than for all older women. Since the number of teen-agers in the population is increasing as the post World War II baby boom group matures, the number of teen-age pregnancies is increasing. Also increasing is the number and percentage of sexually active teen-agers. Sample survey results show that at least 46 percent of the teen-age population is sexually active. The result is an increasing number of teen-agers at risk of becoming pregnant.

Pregnant teens are everyone's daughters: rich, middle-class and welfare dependent parents, white and minority group parents, college professors, the undereducated, the business executive, the laborer and the unemployed. More teen-agers from the higher socioeconomic levels terminate their pregnancies or give birth and place the child for adoption. Pregnant teens from the lower socioeconomic levels and from minority groups, on the other hand, tend to give birth and keep their babies. All share a common and complex set of pregnancy-related problems that place a high school diploma beyond the reach of the vast majority.

Twenty years ago, most pregnant teen-agers were routinely and systematically excluded from public schools as soon as their pregnancy became known to school authorities. Only those who could hide the fact of pregnancy through a quick and secret abortion, often one performed outside the country, were able to complete high school. A few pregnant teens were served by homes for unwed mothers, often located in another community. In such homes, emphasis was placed on confidentiality, shelter and health care. Education programs, when provided, generally were limited, seldom led to a high school diploma and rarely were comprehensive enough to allow the pregnant girl to keep pace with classmates in regular public school programs.

The first public school programs for pregnant teens providing comprehensive health, counseling and education programs emerged in the big cities in the early 1960s. These

All Persons 5 to 17 Years Old Enrolled in School and Enrolled Below the Mode: 1976
(Numbers in thousands. Civilian noninstitutional population)

Age and enrollment status	Total persons	White	Black	Spanish origin[1]
Total persons, 5 to 17 years	49,211	41,293	7,038	3,251
Percent enrolled	95.6	95.7	95.2	93.9
Percent of enrolled below mode	6.4	5.7	10.2	11.0
Persons, 5 to 13 years	32,800	27,434	4.750	2,295
Percent enrolled	95.5	95.5	95.4	94.7
Percent of enrolled below mode	4.6	4.1	7.1	6.4
Persons, 8 to 13 years	22,368	18,746	3,217	1,502
Percent enrolled	99.7	99.7	99.4	99.5
Percent of enrolled below mode	6.2	5.6	9.6	9.0
Persons, 14 to 17 years	16,410	13,859	2,288	956
Percent enrolled	95.1	96.1	94.8	92.1
Percent of enrolled below mode	10.1	8.9	16.6	22.6

[1] Persons of Spanish origin may be of any race.

Source: *Relative Progress of Children in School: 1976;* Series P-20, No. 337; April 1979; Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce

programs typically were unpublicized and offered in separate, out-of-the-way buildings.

Only within the last decade have public schools begun to acknowledge the right of pregnant teens to continue their education. Acknowledgement of that right has been spurred by a growing awareness of the devastating effects of an inadequate education on this group. The right has been confirmed by Supreme Court decisions and underscored by recent federal regulations. The addition of Title IX to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1975 made schools which exclude pregnant teens from the regular program ineligible for federal education funds. The Title IX regulations stipulate that while a district may offer pregnant teens special programs separate from the regular schools, those programs must be comparable to programs offered all students.

Most pregnant teen-agers don't finish school. Securing the educational rights of pregnant teens has yet to place opportunity within the reach of most pregnant girls, as shown by these statistics:

- Eight out of 10 mothers under age 17 never finish high school.
- Nine out of 10 mothers under age 15 never finish high school.
- Four out of 10 mothers under age 15 never go beyond the eighth grade.

Percent of Persons 5 to 17 Years Old Enrolled Below the Mode, by Type and Region of Residence: 1976
(Civilian noninstitutional population)

Type and region of residence	Percent enrolled below modal grade	
	5 to 13 years old	14 to 17 years old
TYPE OF RESIDENCE		
Metropolitan areas	4.1	9.0
Central cities	4.8	11.4
Outside central cities	3.6	7.6
Nonmetropolitan areas	5.8	12.1
REGION OF RESIDENCE		
South	5.8	13.2
Metropolitan areas	5.2	12.1
Nonmetropolitan areas	6.5	14.5
North and West	4.0	8.5
Metropolitan areas	3.7	7.8
Nonmetropolitan areas	5.3	10.3

Source: *Relative Progress of Children in School: 1976*; Series P-20, No. 337; April 1979; Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce.

Health risks are much higher. A chain of pregnancy-related problems builds an insurmountable barrier to high school completion for the majority of very young mothers. Pregnancy and delivery are serious health hazards for physically immature adolescents. The children of teen mothers are two to three times as likely to die within the first year; low birth weight and associated health risks are twice as high; and the incidence of congenital defects is higher.

Keeping up with school becomes unmanageable. Even an uncomplicated teen pregnancy requires more attention to health, nutrition and routine doctor appointments, all of which make regular class attendance more unmanageable for the pregnant teen. Keeping up with classwork even for the brightest becomes a problem under such conditions.

Teen mothers face bleak futures. Throughout their lives, they cluster near the bottom of national statistics on job status and satisfaction, employment rates, education and income level. At the very bottom are female members of racial and ethnic minorities who bear their first child in their teen years.

Teen mothers, on the other hand, cluster near the top of national statistics on welfare dependency, subsequent teen-age pregnancies, mortality and morbidity rates, divorce and separation, and suicide rates. Children of teen mothers, especially those in households headed by a teen mother, more frequently appear in reports of child abuse and neglect, delinquency, truancy, early pregnancies, school failure and school dropouts than do the children of older mothers.

Education makes a positive difference for the teen-age mother. In 1975, teen-age mothers accounted for approximately $4.65 billion in payments for AFDC (Aid for Dependent Children). Approximately 60 percent of all teen-age mothers were ending up on welfare, accounting for about one-half of the national welfare bill. In 1976, 31 percent of the teen-age mothers and former teen-age mothers age 14-30 on the AFDC rolls had failed to complete high school. By way of contrast, only 11 percent of the teen-age mothers and former teen-age mothers who had completed high school were receiving AFDC.

Students from Broken Homes

Students from broken homes, some experts claim, are twice as likely to drop out of school early as are students living with both parents. Statistics correlating family background with the incidence of dropouts show that boys coming from intact homes have a dropout rate of approximately 11.5 percent. For boys in single parent homes where one parent has died, the dropout rate is approximately 16 percent. If the family has been broken by divorce or separation, however, the dorpout rate for boys climbs to 19.6 percent.

Studies show that family separations and break-ups can affect children in a number of ways that are critical to school success.

Studies have shown, for example, that parental control may be eroded; that boys from broken homes may show a

Dropouts or Pushouts?

How many dropouts are pushouts? There is still no answer to that long-standing question.

Here's one view: "We have found that suspensions are by far the strongest variable related to dropouts — and by far the strongest in the urban context of the 100 largest school districts," said Clark Leming, social science analyst with the federal Office for Civil Rights (OCR).

Data gathered by OCR, Leming said, indicate a correlation between dropping out and membership in special education, educably mentally retarded, trainable retarded and vocational education classes. But, he said, the strongest relationship of all was found for suspensions and dropouts. Leming also noted that a much higher proportion of black students are pushed out. They make up 28 percent of the total count of one-time suspensions, 32 percent of multiple suspensions and 34 percent of expulsions. Black students comprise about 15 percent of total enrollment.

poorer-than-average parent relationship; and that boys from broken homes may be below average in accomplishments. One explanation: The socioeconomic level for boys from broken homes tends to be low, and most of the differences between boys from intact homes and broken homes are attributed to the lowered socioeconomic status.

The future looks grim. Population studies and projections show the American family is undergoing rapid and dramatic change. Increasing divorces, separations, remarriages and the growing number of female-headed households are contributing to the change.

For school administrators concerned about student dropouts and absentee rates, the projections are ominous. The number of divorces for both blacks and whites, for example, has risen dramatically since 1970. In 1970, there were 47 divorced persons for every 1,000 married. By 1978, the number had grown by 91 percent to 90 divorced persons for every 1,000 in working marriages.

In addition, eight million families in 1978 were maintained by a woman not living with a husband — an increase of 44 percent over 1970 figures. During the eight-year period, black families maintained by a woman increased 65 percent, while the growth among whites was 36 percent.

In 1978, 11 million children were living with their mothers *only*, and one million were living with their fathers. The growth of one-parent families spurred Census Bureau experts to project that nearly one-half of all children being born today will spend a meaningful portion of their lives before age 18 in single-parent families.

Does Busing Increase Dropout Rates?

When student integration goals are achieved through busing programs, whether court ordered or not, the white and middle class flight from public schools often takes on great proportions.

To illustrate: Detroit reported a greater number of all-black schools in 1978 than before desegregation in 1970. The district's enrollment was 82 percent black in 1978; 60 percent black in 1970.

Another example: Boston reported a total enrollment decline of 21,000 students after three years of busing. Those who left the Boston schools were mostly white and mostly middle class. In 1978, 41 percent of the school population was white, compared with 60 percent in 1976.

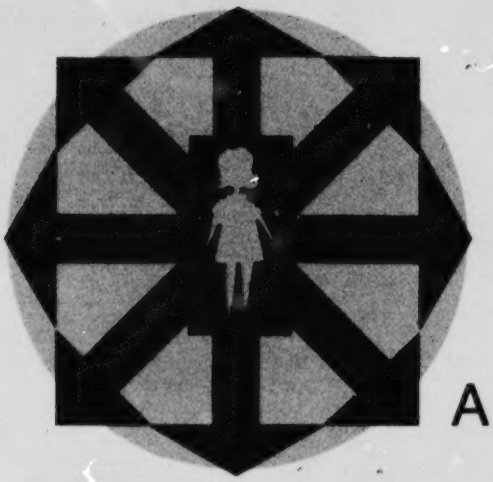
The flight of white and middle class students not only thwarts integration efforts and skews enrollment figures, but some observers believe that it affects attendance and dropout rates.

At least one study — by Delaware state education officials — establishes a link between desegregation efforts and increased dropout rates. Desegregation efforts in Delaware began in 1966, and nonpublic high school enrollment increased from 10.1 percent to 13.7 percent of the statewide secondary level enrollment. During that same period, state education officials concluded, the retention rate of nonpublic high schools increased 63 percent while that for public high schools decreased 6.7 percent. Public school officials, asked by state officials to rank reasons for the increased dropout rates, cited four main reasons: family problems, a need for alternative programs, voluntary transfer and desegregation and, finally, errors in data reporting and collecting. The first two reasons — family problems and a need for alternative programs — are linked to the changed student population being served by the public schools, state officials concluded.

The Delaware Department of Public Instruction noted that public schools reported higher overall dropout rates and higher percentages of black dropouts following desegregation.

Further, they noted, the increase in black dropouts accounted for most of the dropout rate increase across the state. And, although Delaware officials contended that the statewide dropout rate is about average in comparison with the rest of the nation, they also warned that the dropout rate in Delaware is risng.

CHAPTER V



A Look at the Future

National enrollment and population trends are likely to aggravate the twin problems of rising absenteeism and dropout rates faced by school administrators all across the country. Plunging school enrollments have already depressed school budgets and consequently the level of staffing, programs and auxiliary services available to deal with absenteeism and dropout problems.

While many school systems, mostly in suburbia, continue to face expanding school enrollments, the majority of school systems across the nation can expect to face a steady loss of students, tax dollars, teachers, classrooms, schools, programs and services into the mid-1980s.

The post World War II baby boom that sent a tidal wave of students into the nation's public school classrooms crested at the elementary level in 1969 at nearly 32.6 million students and at the secondary level in 1976 with an all-time enrollment high of 14.3 million students. According to the NCES, the nation's public schools lost approximately 4.3 million K-12 students between the peak period of 1971 and the start of the 1979-80 school year. Enrollment in 1979-80 — approximately 41.9 million in grades K-12 — is expected to drop to 39.5 million in 1983, when a slight enrollment upturn is projected.

NCES enrollment projections use current population, birth rate and grade retention statistics extended into the future. Forecasts or predictions, based on subjective analysis of likely future conditions, are left to others. Often those "others" are local and state school officers who must decide this year how many classrooms, teachers, support personnel, programs and services their schools need and can afford next year and in five years. To be able to make such decisions, administrators need to be aware of current birth rate trends and U.S. Census Bureau assumptions.

The declining fertility rate was expected to level off at 2.1 children per woman; instead, it reached an all-time low in 1976 of 1.76 children per woman.

The U.S. Census Bureau suggests that more women are delaying childbearing into their late 20s and 30s, accounting for a temporary low, which may increase in the next decade to produce an ultimate average of 2.1 live births per woman. NCES enrollment projections are based on this Census data evaluation.

Immigration patterns. Census data assume that population growth due to immigration will remain constant. Currently, one-fourth of the nation's population growth is attributed to immigration. However, a change in immigration policies to accommodate the thousands of Vietnamese refugees, for example, could impact school enrollment projections. Joseph Coates of the federal Office of Technology Assessment noted that changing the status of new, illegal immigrants — a move prompted by some to resolve the complex legal and human problems surrounding the continuing stream of illegal migrant workers from Mexico — could promote marriage and family formation with a resulting influx of new children into U.S. schools.

The NCES enrollment projections through 1986 assume that each age group will lose a percentage of students each year as that group moves through the grades. While schools are expected to exercise a continuing holding power of close to 98 percent throughout the elementary grades, NCES projections assume that 10th grade enrollment will be 96.9 percent of 9th grade. The federal statistical agency also predicts a loss of 8.8 percent from the 10th grade to the 11th grade and another 10 percent from the 11th grade to the 12th grade. That has been the predictable yearly student loss in age group populations for the past half decade.

What the projections don't anticipate. NCES projections do not anticipate that school efforts to reduce dropout rates will have a significant impact on enrollment in the next five years. Nor do the projections anticipate a significant rise in dropout rates, contrary to cautions by officials who point to increasing problems reported by big city school

systems and 1978 statistics which indicate a slightly higher percentage of student dropouts than one year earlier.

Migration Patterns

Regardless of the validity of NCES enrollment projections, internal migration patterns are likely to exert a continuing negative influence on many local efforts to curb rising absentee and dropout rates.

Figures released by the Census Bureau in August 1979 showed that 21 percent of the nation's 75 million households — or a total of 15.8 million — moved during the 12 months ending October 1977. The figure represents a 1.2 million increase over the previous year's figures.

Regionally, the greatest proportion of households that moved occurred in the West (28 percent). The proportions for the rest of the nation were 22 percent of households in the South; 20 percent in the North Central states and 16 percent in the Northeast. Another finding of the survey: Renters moved at four times the rate of owners.

Demographic trends show that in spite of national enrollment decline generally, many states, regions and communities are continuing to experience enrollment growth, often at an alarming resource-depleting rate. Arizona and Florida led the list of 12 Southern and Southwestern states in school enrollment growth in the 1970s. Arizona gained 8.9 percent in students between 1970 and 1974 and Florida enrolled 8.1 percent more students in 1974 than four years earlier. In contast, three out of every four states lost students. Sixteen states lost at least 4 percent of their enrollment while Kansas schools were confronted with a 13 percent enrollment decline, highest in the nation.

Population trends within states also show uneven but predictable shifts in local school enrollment totals. Demographers find that nearly one-fourth of the internal migrants are young adults who, at age 20-24, move from rural areas into large cities or metropolitan suburbs. Between the ages of 25 and 29 — the prime child-bearing years — these young adults move again from the cities to the suburbs or to rural counties adjacent to metropolitan areas to start their families.

In the populations shifts, rural towns and big cities are hardest hit by declining school enrollments. Between 1971 and 1976, the 27 largest urban school systems reportedly lost 1.1 million students. Rural Minnesota, on the other hand, anticipated a 60 percent total student loss by 1990. In contrast, counties adjacent to large metropolitan areas gained 6.2 percent in student enrollment between 1970 and 1974.

The urban school population loss is attributed to the flight of mostly white, affluent middle class families from the big cities and big city schools. Although the populations of some central cities are starting to grow again, enrollments in big city schools are not. Parents seem less tolerant of inadequate school services than of any other city service. "Residents are more likely to judge schools adequate than any other neighborhood services," said the 1975 annual housing survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census. "Yet, one-fourth of the residents who find the schools unsatisfactory want to move because of this dissatisfaction."

Coates noted that the more affluent, mostly white, middle class parents are choosing in increasing numbers to move, to enroll their children in private or parochial schools, to encourage their children to graduate early and enter college early, or to seek a tracking program for the more academically oriented student in the public school system. As a result, big city schools have a higher and increasing proportion of minority students than either the city population or the nation, a higher and increasing proportion of students from impoverished families and a higher proportion of students with foreign language backgrounds. All three factors negatively influence attendance and enrollment rates.

Meeting the needs of these youth requires additional costly services at a time when school budgets are already squeezed. But failure to meet children's educational needs, recent studies have shown, promotes their "escape" from the classroom through irregular attendance, truancy and, finally, early school departure.

Changes Ahead

The downward spiral of attendance and enrollment means fewer state school dollars, whether state aid is based on enrollment or attendance. The resulting erosion of urban school progams and services means increasing middle class dissatisfaction with school quality, fewer middle class urban students and fewer resources available to the schools to meet the needs of a rising proportion of students requiring more services.

By the mid 1980s, a larger proportion of the student population will be from minority groups. The nation's black population numbered approximately 24.2 million or 11 percent of the total population in early 1976. Persons of Spanish origin numbered about 12 million (5 percent of the population) in early 1978. Taken as a whole, both the black and Spanish origin populations are younger than the white population. Census Bureau data for 1976 show that 29 percent of whites were under age 18, compared with 39 percent of the black population and 44 percent of persons of Spanish origin. Spanish origin families also tend to be larger. In 1976, for example, about 33 percent of families of Spanish origin had five or more members, compared with 20 percent of all families in the nation.

Another factor to be considered in figuring future demographic and enrollment trends, according to the Census Bureau, is the higher rate at which black single women give birth. The Bureau said in its 1976 population profile that "the rate of children born to black single women 18 to 44 years old as of 1976 was more than 10 times the rate for corresponding white single women."

Why should the projected changes in the make-up of the student population be of concern to school administrators and school boards? For one thing, if historical trends continue, school absentee rates and dropout rates will be higher in the future. Both rates have traditionally been higher for black and other minority group students than they have been for whites. Another headline-making problem which will impact on school dropout rates and absentee rates in the near future is the increasing numbers of very young girls giving birth.

• Practices • Policies • Programs

The next three chapters detail how administrators and boards of education are trying to keep students in school.

The chapter on "Practices" contains findings of the **Critical Issues Survey:** how many districts are following written attendance policies, attendance taking practices of teachers, who's responsible for attendance.

The chapter on "Policies" analyzes school attendance policies from all across the country. It's full of ideas for cutting absentee rates.

The chapter on "Programs" illustrates workable ideas and programs at the federal, state and local levels to deal with all forms of non-attendance and to reduce dropout rates.

CHAPTER VI

School District Attendance Practices

The survey conducted for this **Critical Issues Report** included questions to determine the current status of school attendance practices. The results follow:

School Attendance Policies

Nearly four out of five (79 percent) of the administrators participating in the survey reported that their school board follows written policy on student attendance. That practice is most common in the Southeast and West and least common in the Northeast. One out of four administrators in the Northeast said their school board failed to follow such a written policy. Another generalization that can be made: The larger the school district, the more apt it is to follow written policy. Slightly more than 90 percent of the largest school districts (more than 25,000 students) follow written policies, according to respondents, compared with 77 percent of the smallest districts (under 5,000 students).

What constitutes a written policy on attendance varies considerably. Approximately 79 percent of the administrators whose districts follow a written policy submitted a copy along with their survey forms. The policies range from a one-sentence recognition that "attendance is expected" to printed booklets detailing responsibilities of staff, parents and students; consequences of irregular attendance and truancy; definition of excused and unexcused absences; and procedures expected of students, parents and staff.

Attendance Taking

In response to the survey, 94 percent of all participants said teachers are required to take attendance each period of the school day. Required attendance taking was reported most frequently by respondents from the Northeast (94.8 percent) and least frequently by those from the West (91.8 percent).

An analysis of the returns by district size revealed that almost 12 percent of the largest school districts (over 25,000 students) do not require teachers to take attendance each period. By way of comparison, attendance taking each period is required, according to the respondents, in all but 5.9 percent of the smallest districts (under 5,000 students), 4.9 percent of the districts with enrollments of 5,000 to 9,999 students and 3.1 percent of the districts enrolling from 10,000 to 25,000 students.

Dealing with Serious Problems

The survey asked district administrators to indicate the methods used to help students who have serious attendance problems. The most frequently cited methods, according to the respondents, are phone calls seeking parent intervention and one-to-one counseling of students.

Here's a detailed breakdown of the returns:

N	*% Using Method*	*Method*
1269	89.8	Phone calls seeking parent intervention
1224	86.6	One-to-one counseling of students
987	69.8	Letters seeking parent intervention
947	66.9	Legal action (e.g., truant officers, court intervention)
853	60.3	Suspension and/or expulsion
830	58.0	Visits to student's home
541	38.2	Placement in alternative classroom or other learning center
367	26.0	Reduction of course grade
181	12.8	Other

In the "other" category, respondents included such methods as withholding grades, referral to community so-

cial service agencies, in-school and after-school detention, special Saturday make-up classes, requirements to attend night school, parent conferences at school and use of School Attendance Review Boards in California.

Who's Responsible for Attendance?

Administrators were asked in the AASA survey to name the staff position primarily responsible for insuring student attendance, to specify how much of that individual's time was devoted to attendance and to provide a job description for the position. Responses to that portion of the survey show a general lack of school district commitment to attendance issues in the form of staff time, staff resources and clear designation of responsibilities.

The principal was consistently identified as the staff member primarily responsible for attendance. This was true in responses from districts of all sizes and from all regions of the country. Of the 1,259 respondents identifying a staff member primarily responsible for attendance in their district, 43.1 percent named the principal. More than half (52 percent) of the administrators from smaller districts (under 5,000 students) did so.

In spite of the widespread acknowledgement that responsibility for attendance rests most often with the school principal, job descriptions for building principals often do not include any reference to attendance duties or goals. Even lengthy job descriptions, such as one submitted by a Nebraska school district which detailed 28 specific duties, seldom go beyond noting that one of the principal's responsibilities is to "maintain attendance rolls for students."

Not much of the principal's time is spent on attendance in many districts. Of the 566 respondents identifying the principal as primarily responsible for attendance, 18 percent reported that less than 5 percent of the principal's time is devoted to attendance matters.

The assistant principal and the attendance officer are the other staff positions, in addition to the principal, with primary responsibility for attendance, according to the survey results.

The assistant principal was named by 17.6 percent of all survey respondents. The assistant principal most frequently is charged with responsibility for attendance in districts of fewer than 5,000 students. Almost one-half (49.3 percent) of the respondents from that size district named the assistant principal. In contrast, only 4.3 percent of the respondents from the largest districts did so.

Of those identifying an assistant principal as the person primarily responsible for attendance, only 5.9 percent said all of the assistant principal's time was devoted to attendance issues. On the other hand, 19 percent said less than 5 percent of the working time of the assistant principal involved attendance. A review of job descriptions for assistant principals with responsibility for attendance indicated that they almost always specify responsibility for "maintaining records," often include responsibility for "notification of parents and proper authorities" of absent students, but seldom mention responsibilities for improving attendance.

One out of four respondents named attendance officers, supervisors, directors, counselors and coordinators as the staff member primarily responsible for insuring student attendance. This staff position is most frequently found in districts with enrollments of more than 25,000 students and in the Southeast. Two out of five administrators from all districts with student populations above 5,000 named the attendance officer as primarily responsible, while less than one out of five administrators from the smallest districts indicated an attendance officer was assigned that responsibility.

Attendance officers are also called: attendance monitor, coordinator of attendance division and juvenile court liaison, attendance and child welfare supervisor, attendance counselor and student activities coordinator.

Despite the apparent widespread use of such staff persons to address attendance problems, little consensus was evident among school districts on appropriate job qualifications or position in the administrative hierarchy. Similar listings of

With a little help from the feds

How To Cut the Truancy Rate

Giving priority to attendance matters can make a difference. Consider what happened in the Ohio County (W. Va.) Schools. The absentee rate in the 9,000-student district averaged 11 percent when John Nanny was named director of attendance. Nanny's predecessor had been the sole staff member charged with attendance responsibilities. He was also responsible for personally providing homebound instruction to all students unable to attend class because of physical or emotional problems. The immediate needs of the homebound students left little time to devote to other attendance problems in the district's 21 schools.

Today, Nanny supervises two full-time and six part-time homebound teachers and one full-time home-school visitor. All are funded through Title IV-C of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The attendance personnel work with families of truants in their homes. The result: A reduction in the absentee rate to 7 percent. Nanny says freeing him to work on attendance problems with teachers, counselors, principals and outside agencies has been responsible for the decline.

job responsibilities for this staff position appear on job descriptions whether the position is listed as certificated or not, and whether job qualifications require an undergraduate degree, post graduate work in guidance, a high school diploma or law enforcement-experience.

Supervision of the attendance officer is also subject to great variability. In some districts this staff member is supervised by the building principal, in others by the superintendent or an assistant superintendent, and in some by the director of pupil personnel services. In a few states, the attendance officer is employed by a county or regional school administrative office and assigned to work with local districts or schools.

Job descriptions for attendance officers submitted for this report specified a broad range of daily "hands on" responsibilities for attendance matters: contacting parents by phone; sending letters and making home visits; counseling and follow-up conferences with truants; sending official legal notifications of violation of state laws to parents or students in case of chronic absenteeism or truancy; counseling with school counselors, social workers and other school staff members; working with law officials and serving as school liaison with the courts; preparing and monitoring daily student attendance reports; consulting with building principals and the cental office staff in identifying problems and recommending changes in policies and procedures.

More than one-third of the job descriptions for attendance officers submitted for this report showed a wide range of job responsibilities. In addition to attendance, other responsibilities include functions connected with textbooks, transportation, extracurricular programs, testing or instruction for homebound students.

How many of the attendance officers devote all of their time to attendance? Slightly more than one-third (35.1 percent), according to the survey results. The majority of respondents indicated that less than 75 percent of the staff member's time was spent on attendance issues. Approximately 8 percent of districts employing attendance officers reported that only 5 percent of the job actually involved attendance matters.

In the Northeast, home school visitors or home visitors — often but not always trained in social work — were named as primarily responsible for attendance by 8.8 percent of the respondents. Another 6 percent of the Northeastern administrators identified a pupil personnel director or supervisor, usually on the school superintendent's staff, as primarily responsible for attendance.

Larger districts are more likely to use social workers or child welfare workers than smaller districts, the survey results show. In the Southeast, this staff position is also called a visiting teacher. Approximately 7 percent of the administrators in that region said a visiting teacher carried primary responsibility for attendance.

Duties of a director or supervisor of pupil personnel services are seldom limited to atttendance matters. Instead, this staff position is typically characterized by its leadership function in developing and implementing policies and procedures aimed at improving attendance, according to an analysis of job descriptions submitted for this report. The pupil personnel director typically supervises and coordinates the efforts of guidance, attendance and social work staff in a team approach designed to address all aspects of attendance problems.

In spite of worthy job goals and clearly delineated responsibilities for attendance personnel, many parent, community and other groups studying local school attendance difficulties frequently express dismay over the "watering down" of attendance staff members' effectiveness through assignment of other time-consuming duties. Typical is the recommendation included in the New York State Senate Task Force Report. It calls for elimination of the practice of using guidance and attendance personnel for programming and clerical duties. Equally problematical for school administrators, however, is the difficulty in allocating sufficient staff resources to attendance in the current period of declining enrollments and staff cutbacks.

CHAPTER VII

School Board Policies on Attendance

Federal, state and local considerations all help determine school attendance policies. Under federal law, for example, school districts may not discriminate in providing an education for minority and poor youth, married youth and pregnant females. The Constitution and the Supreme Court both help define how youth should be treated.

At the state level, constitutional provisions, statutory provisions, court decisions and rules and regulations provide legal standards and shape school attendance policies.

At the local level, elected or appointed, short- or long-term school board members, acting as a body, determine policy and direction. The school attendance policy they adopt may set a tight districtwide standard or offer considerable discretion to superintendents, principals and teachers.

All things considered, great variation can be found in school attendance policies and procedures from state to state, from district to district and, sometimes, from school to school within the same district.

The basic intent of school attendance policies is to keep students in school. Consequently, most policies begin by quoting the state's compulsory attendance law or with a rationale for regular school attendance. In addition, the policies usually state that the parents or guardians are legally responsible for their child's attendance. Some policies establish that parents and school administrators are jointly responsible for assuring attendance. The wording of the school attendance policy is important because it sets the tone for enforcement. Legally, school administrators must adhere to the policy. A strong, clear document can lead to strong, unambiguous enforcement. A weak, fuzzy document allows for loopholes and leaves school administrators without a basis for enforcement.

Policies Establish Rationale

The excerpts that follow were taken from policies submitted for this **Critical Issues Report**. Note that many of the policies establish a rationale for insisting on regular attendance. Some treat attendance as a responsibility of parents, while others state that it is a joint responsibility of parents and school. Some of the policies state explicitly that the district is committed to an either/or attitude on attendance: either come to school or grades will be affected. A few districts note in their policies that nonattendance by students means less state aid for the district.

The Independent School District of Boise City, Idaho: ". . . The parent or guardian of any child resident in this state who has attained the age of seven years at the time of commencement of school in this district, but not the age of 16 years, shall cause the child to be instructed in subjects commonly and usually taught in the public schools of the state of Idaho. Unless the child is otherwise comparably instructed, . . . the parent or guardian shall cause the child to attend a public, private or parochial school during a period each year equal to that in which the public schools are in session. . . ." That much of the district's attendance policy is taken from Idaho law. The policy adds: "Regular and consistent attendance is necessary for successful school work. The Independent School District of Boise City expects each child of school age to be in attendance each day school is in session, unless prevented by an excused absence."

The Greencastle-Antrim (Pa.) Schools: "Regular attendance is necessary to insure the continuity of the educational process. Regularity of attendance is desirable in developing proper habits, the feeling of mastery through success, interest in school, a sense of responsibility and those important character building aspects of the molding process on the young life which have a definite effect upon later life. It is essential that parents and school authorities plan for anticipated absences together whenever possible. This will assure fulfillment of the school's aim to help pupils plan and accept responsibility for their actions."

The Norwich (Conn.) Free Academy: "The learning experiences that take place in the classroom environment are considered to be a meaningful and essential part of its educational system. Absences tend to disrupt the continuity of the instructional process. Time lost from class is irretrievable, particularly in terms of opportunity for interaction and exchange of ideas between students, and students and teachers. Therefore, classroom attendance is considered to be an integral part of the student's course of study. . . . Grades earned in any course shall reflect the student's daily attendance as well as the fulfillment of other academic requirements as may be established by the teacher. A penalty shall be assessed by the teacher for any unexcused absence in accordance with policy established by the school."

Fremont Union High School District, Sunnyvale, Calif.: "Attendance policies for apportionment purposes are strictly governed by state law. As a result, it is necessary to be precise in categorizing absences to have the financial

Policies Say the Darnedest Things

The following statements were found in various school board policies on attendance:

"The Board accepts as legal an act of God or emergency situation determined as being acceptable by the principal."

"Regularity and punctuality of attendance are necessary and important factors to success in school. Most vacations require punctual attendance; subsequently, students should begin to develop that habit while in school."

"The . . . Board of Education promotes regular attendance as one assurance toward equality education."

"Each child actually resident in this state is subject to the laws relating to compulsory attendance and neither he nor the person in charge of him shall be excused from the operation of those laws or penalties under them on the ground that the child's residence is seasonable. . . ."

"Excused absences are due to verified personal illness, verified serious illness or death in the immediate family and to certified Acts-of-God."

"Attendance requires a systematic accounting of students for their protection."

"Attendance is accepted by authorities in the field of guidance as symptomatic behavior."

"A student must attend class 160 days . . . (except in cases) of extended or choronic illness."

resources needed to provide a high quality educational program. Additionally, students need to develop good habits of attendance and are urged to be punctual to school and to classes. Personnel managers of business and industry have informed school officials that the school absence and tardy record of the individual is often the most important factor to be considered when hiring takes place. . . . The district, therefore, considers part of its responsibility to students to be the encouragement of consistent and timely attendance. For these reasons, the following policies and regulations will apply to absences and tardies. . . ."

Glacier (Mont.) High School: "Regular attendance at school is necessary if students are to gain full benefit from their educational opportunity while in high school. It is not the responsibility of the school to force students to attend high school after they have reached the age of 16 and have graduated from the eighth gade. This is the state law. The school has neither the time, personnel nor finances to pursue students who persist in staying away from school. However, it is the responsibility of the school to do everything it can to provide a learning environment which will encourage students to attend. It is also the responsibility of the school to inform the parent of their child's attendance record and cooperate with the home in bringing about better attendance. . . ."

Firth (Idaho) School District #59: "Attendance at school is more than a legal obligation, it is a privilege. Every child of compulsory school age must be in attendance unless otherwise exempted. . . ."

The Scottsdale Unified School District #48, Phoenix, Ariz., notes in its secondary school attendance policy that school personnel are responsible for keeping parents informed of actions that might have a detrimental effect upon the educational growth of individual students. The policy adds: "High school attendance is ultimately the responsibility of the student and his/her family. Students should remain out of school only when absolutely necessary, as much of the classroom activity cannot be made up. The benefit of lectures, discussions and participation is lost forever to those who are absent. It must be emphasized that regular attendance is the key to much of the success a student may gain from his/her high school diploma."

Pasadena (Tex.) Independent School District: "The administration should impress upon the students the importance of regular attendance for a successful school career. Most teaching is done in orderly sequence, and if this pattern is broken by poor attendance, the student can expect grade problems. From a financial standpoint, the higher the average daily attendance report the more funds are received from the state under the Foundation Program."

School Attendance: What's Required

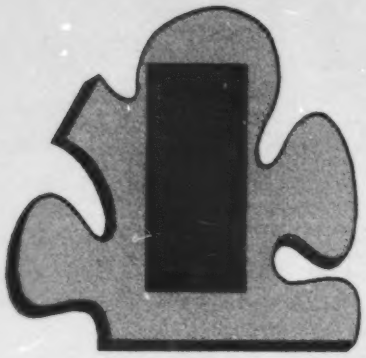
In almost all states the minimum number of days that a school must be in session is determined by statutes. As shown in the chart of "School Attendance Requirements," the most common minimum number of instruction days is 180. A dozen states penalize schools or local boards of education which violate the statutory minimum by a loss of state aid. However, since many states calculate state aid on the basis of average daily membership (ADM), a school does not lose state aid due to temporary absences of its students.

The chart also shows that most states have enacted legislation specifying the length of the school day. Frequently, the length of the day will vary according to the grade level. The average length of the school day is five or six hours.

School Attendance: What's Required

STATES	PUPIL-INSTRUCTION DAYS		LENGTH OF DAY (in hours) BY GRADE LEVEL				MINIMUM CLASS LENGTH	
	Minimum	Maximum					Daily (minutes)	Annual (hours)
ALABAMA								
ALASKA	180		1-3:4	4-12:5				
ARIZONA	175		K:2	1-3:4	4-6:5	7-8:6		
ARKANSAS	150		K-12:5					
CALIFORNIA	175		K:3	1-8:4				
COLORADO	172		K:2½	1-6:5½	7-12:6		60	
CONNECTICUT	180		K:2½	1-12:4				
DELAWARE	180							
FLORIDA	180		K:3	1-3:4	4-12:5			
GEORGIA	175		1-3:4½	4-12:6				
HAWAII								
IDAHO	180		K-12:6				40	
ILLINOIS	176		1:4	2-12:5				
INDIANA	175		1-2:4½	3-4:15	5-6:5½	7-12:6	50	
IOWA	180							
KANSAS	180		K-11:6	12:5				
KENTUCKY	185		K-12:6					
LOUISIANA	180		K-12:5					
MAINE	180(a)							
MARYLAND	180		K:12:6					
MASSACHUSETTS	180		1-6:5	7-12:5½				
MICHIGAN	180		(b)					
MINNESOTA	175	200	K:2½	1-3:5	4-6:5½		50	
MISSISSIPPI	175		K:12:5-6				45	
MISSOURI	174	180	K:3	1-12:6			40	
MONTANA	180		K:2	1-3:4	4-12:6			
NEBRASKA	175		K:2	1-12:5			40	
NEVADA	180		K:2	1-2:4	3-6:5	7-12:5½		
NEW HAMPSHIRE	180							
NEW JERSEY	180		K:4					
NEW MEXICO	180							
NEW YORK	190							
NORTH CAROLINA	180		K-12:6					
NORTH DAKOTA	180		K-12:6				40	
OHIO	182		1-12:5					
OKLAHOMA	180		K:2½	1:5	2-12:6		55	
OREGON	175							
PENNSYLVANIA	180		K:2½	1-6:5	7-12:5½		40	
RHODE ISLAND	180	190	K:2½	1-8:5	9-12:5½			
SOUTH CAROLINA	180		K:2½	1:4	2-12:5			
SOUTH DAKOTA	175	190	K:2½	1-3:4	4-12:5½			
TENNESSEE	175		1 12:6½					
TEXAS	165		K-12:7					
UTAH								
VERMONT	175		K:2	1-2:4	3-12:5½			
VIRGINIA	180		K-12:5					
WASHINGTON	180		K:3	1-3:4	4-12:5			
WEST VIRGINIA	180	185						
WISCONSIN	180							
WYOMING	180							
DIST. OF COL.								

(a) Maine: not less than 180 days, including 5 days for inservice training.
(b) Michigan: 450 hours per year for kindergarten; 900 hours per year for grades 1-12.
Source: **State Legal Standards for the Provision of Public Education: An Overview**, National Institute of Education, 1978.



Legal and Illegal Absences Lower Attendance

School districts excuse students from attendance for a number of reasons. The most commonly accepted reason is personal illness, but various districts excuse students for the following: severe illness or death in the family, family need, religious observances, quarantine, impassable roads or extreme weather conditions, court appearances, health appointments, school sponsored activities, college visitation or job interviews and other reasons such as family vacations, which have to be approved by the building principal.

Generally, absences are classified as legal or illegal. In various districts, however, legal absences may be referred to as excused, exempt, permitted, explained or prearranged. Illegal absences may be called unexcused, nonexempt, unexplained or truancy. In some districts, no distinction is made between legal and illegal absences. Instead, a maximum number of absences is allowed; any absence beyond the maximum may warrant loss of credit or school attendance privileges.

Other variations in school attendance policies relate to the amount of required attendance and the penalties for nonattendance. Here are some of the variations found in district policies:

What's Legal?

It depends on the state and the district. Even the most commonly accepted excuse for absence — illness — is subject to variation. Many districts allow two days' illness without a doctor's excuse; but an excuse must be presented for illness in excess of two days. In Xenia City, Ohio, students must bring a doctor's excuse for absences due to illness in excess of five consecutive days. At St. Charles (Ill.) High School, students who are absent for illness or injury that extends beyond five school days are required to have a conference with the school nurse before returning to class.

Most school districts allow students to be excused for medical or dental appointments. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg (N.C.) School District allows an excused absence for "mental, emotional and physical incapacity." Independent School District #347, Willmar, Minn., accepts excuses for medical and dental appointments only during a student's study hall periods or in emergency situations during the school day. Similarly, the Des Moines (Iowa) Public Schools consider students legally absent for medical and dental appointments on school time only when such appointments cannot be made at any other time.

Parent-Approved Absences

Some districts are much more exacting than others about parent-approved absences.

In one district, a request by a parent is required three weeks ahead of the absence, although most districts require notice of one week or less. Some districts say in policy statements that approval will be granted only if the student has not been excessively absent prior to the parental request. Some districts allow individual teachers some say in whether students will be excused on a parent's request for such activities as a family vacation. Many districts require that students complete assignments as requested by individual teachers prior to a parent approved or parent-requested absence. The Goodhue, Minn., School District reminds parents in its attendance policy that "only the school has legal authority to excuse pupils from attendance." It adds: "Parental permission is not enough."

Vacations

In the Bloomfield Hills (Mich.) School District, excused absences due to family trips should not exceed a total of five days per school year, says the district's policy.

Taxpayer Drain

Nonattendance: $10 Per Student Per Day

The Ellenville (N.Y.) Central School figures that one day of student absenteeism wastes $10 of taxpayers' money.

"When a student is absent from school, legally or illegally," Ellenville school officials say, "the district loses about $2 daily in state aid. Since the total daily cost to educate each pupil is nearly $12, the net loss to taxpayers is $10."

Noting the cost, school officials urged all staff members to be concerned about attendance. "In the Ellenville Central School, attendance is everyone's business," officials asserted.

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Euphemistically Speaking. . .

In Maine a truant is a "child in need of service." In Hawaii truants are "children suffering from educational neglect." In New York the truant sometimes is a "long-term absentee" who may also be a PINS, or "person in need of supervision."

An absent student is also a "nonattender" who may or may not be a truant depending on whether the absence is legal or illegal, excused or unexcused, avoidable or unavoidable, acceptable or unacceptable.

A school dropout is also a "discontinuer" or an "early leaver."

In some districts a student who misses class for unexcused reasons is an absentee until he or she is chronically absent. Then the truancy label may apply.

The act of missing class or school days for unacceptable reasons is sluffing, cutting, ditching, skipping or playing hooky, depending on which school the child fails to attend.

Finally, in Massachusetts attendance officers are required to seek out "children in need of service" on city streets and public places during school hours and "render immediate service on the spot" — with or without a warrant.

North Allegheny Senior and Intermediate High Schools, Pittsburgh, Pa., allow students to be excused from school for part of a day, a full day or a longer time at the request of the parent for an educational tour or trip or to participate in an activity "recognized by the parents and the principal as having educational value." The student is required to complete the appropriate vacation form (supplied by the school) at least two weeks in advance of the anticipated absence from school. The student also is responsible for obtaining from teachers all assignments which will be given during the period of absence. The assignments must be completed as required by the teachers.

In the Vicksburg Community Schools, District #49, Kalmazoo and St. Joseph Counties, Mich., family trips of up to six days are allowed if they meet three conditions: the trip must be taken with the immediate family; parents must make arrangements prior to the trip with a school attendance officer; arrangements for make-up work must be made with teachers prior to leaving.

Wolverine (Mich.) Junior and Senior High School allows students up to 10 days' excused absence for trips. Anything over the 10-day maximum is counted as part of the school's 15-day maximum for all absences in one semester. Another stipulation: If students do not complete all work in advance of a trip, the time missed is counted in the 15-day maximum. The school also counts three unexcused tardies as one absence.

In Miller, S.D., any student at the Sunshine Bible Academy who is absent immediately before or after a school vacation without administrative approval can be fined for an additional day of absence ($10 for the first additional day, more thereafter).

One Florida district says it may or may not provide a "convenience absence" for students to accompany their family on a trip. It adds: "Parents should realize that the student's attempting to make up the work missed will not take the place of classroom instruction. Grades may suffer accordingly."

The Camas (Wash.) School District requires that a pre-arranged absence form be signed by student, parent and instructors. It also requires that teachers make any necessary comments regarding the effect of the absence on the student.

Homer (Mich.) High School says pre-excused absences may be denied any student who has accumulated five absences per semester for any reason.

School Sponsored Activities

Most districts count as excused any absence resulting from a school sponsored event. The Mount Pleasant (Pa.) Area High School makes a distinction between school-sponsored and school approved trips. It says school sponsored trips or activities which result in absences will not count against the student as days absent. School approved trips or activities, on the other hand, count as absent days. The assistant principal has the job of deciding which activity is approved and which is sponsored.

Music and Dancing Lessons

The policy of the Salt Lake City Board of Education says "no student shall be given permission to be absent from school during the regular session to take music, drawing, dancing or other lessons, to attend matinees or to participate in non-school programs except by special permission of the superintendent." Not so strict is the Kanawha County (W.Va.) Schools. There, pupils may be dismissed from study halls to participate in outside activites such as music and dancing lessons.

Illegal Absences

Some districts include in their policies a general description of an unexcused or illegal absence, thus allowing the building principal to make a specific determination in each case. For example, the policy of the Wheatland, Glendo and Chugwater (Wyo.) elementary schools says: "An excused absence is one which is considered unavoidable or one in which circumstances surrounding the absence are justified

as valid." Another illustration: The policy of Casper (Wyo.) School District says an unexcused absence "may occur with the prior knowledge and approval of the parents, but for reasons which are not acceptable to the principal as justifiable." In the Scottsdale Unified School District #48, Phoenix, Ariz., an unexcused absence is "any absence of one or more class periods which has not been excused by a parent within the limits expressed in the district attendance procedures."

Other districts state explicitly what will be considered an unexcused absence. In the Bloomfield Hills (Mich.) School District, the following are unacceptable reasons for absence: oversleeping, car trouble, class cuts, truancy, leaving school without permission and "no specific reasons for the absence."

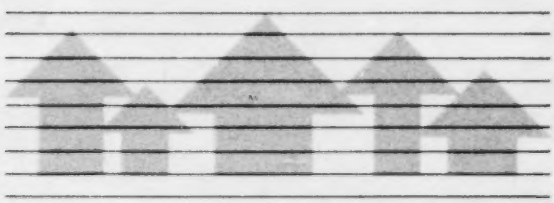
The Baltimore (Md.) City Public Schools describe unlawful absences as "those which are unexplained or absences where the reason or cause is contrary to applicable law." The district cites these specific examples: uncertified illness of a student, illness in the family, poverty, illegal employment, truancy, no explanation and any absences which have parental permission but are unlawful, e.g., babysitting, running an errand.

Suspension and Expulsion

An in-school suspension generally is not counted as an absence. To the contrary, an out-of-school suspension may be counted not only as an absence but one that is unexcused. In many districts, an unexcused absence carries with it an additional punishment: Make-up work is not permitted or, if it is, it doesn't count. The effect can be a zero for the days suspended or substantial lowering of the course or semester grade.

In the Berea City (Ohio) School District, suspension, expulsion or removal from school results in an unexcused absence from classes. The student does not receive scholastic credit for the period of absence, nor is he allowed to attend curricular or extracurricular activites or to be on school property.

The Skyline Public School District, Seattle, Wash., says absences resulting from administrative action (suspension) are prearranged and therefore not counted toward the limit of unexcused absences. The district states further that in cases of suspension, teachers shall provide the opportunity for students to make up assignments and exams if such assignments or tests have a substantial effect upon the student's semester grade or if failure to complete such assignments or tests would preclude the student from receiving credit for the course.



Minimum Standards: An Effort To Bolster Attendance

Many school districts, in their efforts to bolster attendance, are imposing minimum attendance standards. They may be stated in half-days, in days or in percentages.

In addition, some districts have abolished the difference between excused and unexcused absences. In other words, students can miss up to the minimum number of days per class, per semester or per year with no questions asked, no excuses required.

Most districts adopting such policies attempt to make clear that maximum attendance is expected. To illustrate: The Concordia R-II (Mo.) School District adopted a new policy for the 1978-79 school year which sets a 12-absence limit for any one class. Absences in excess of 11, the district said, would cause students to earn an F for the semester. In addition, the new policy requires that students remain in the class until the semester ends, regardless of the number of absences. The school district said the allowable absences are to be used for such things as personal illness, professional appointments, serious personal and family problems and parental vacations.

Students should realize and understand, said the Concordia policy, "that the 11 days built into the attendance policy are not to be considered as approved to skip classes, but rather they should be used only as indicated by this policy."

Louisiana adopted a generous minimum attendance policy. Under the policy, enacted by the Louisiana State Board of Education in 1977, elementary students are required to attend only 140 days out of a normal school year of 180 days to be eligible to receive credit. Any student missing more than 40 days is not eligible for promotion, except in case of extended personal illness verified by a physician or other extenuating circumstances. Secondary students must be present a minimum of 70 days out of 90 per semester to be eligible to receive credit for the courses taken.

The Louisiana minimum standard — which allows an approximate 22 percent absentee rate — is more generous than most other minimum standards reviewed for this **Critical Issues Report**. To illustrate: Fowler (Colo.) High School permits seven days' absence per semester, with no excuses from home needed following an absence. Pascack Valley High School, Hillsdale, Wis., set 14 as the maximum number of days a student may be absent from a course per semester and still receive credit. Excluded from the 14-absence limit are any absences due to illness which

are accompanied by a doctor's note, all absences for approved religious holidays and any absence due to legal obligations. At Three Rivers (Mich.) High School, a 15-day attendance policy was put into effect in 1978. It denies academic credit to any student who misses 15 or more days in any class. All absences, excused or unexcused, are included in the policy. Extension of the 15-day limit is possible "in cases of severe illness or other uncontrollable circumstances." Here's a sampling of policies adopted for other schools and districts:

- 8 one-half days in four weeks: In Carlton, Ore., district policy allows eight unexcused half-day absences in any four-week period, or five days in three months, or 10 days in a six-month term.
- 8 sessions in nine-week course: In the Wapakoneta (Ohio) Senior High School, absences are limited to eight sessions in a nine-week course, 15 sessions in a semester course and 30 sessions in a full-year course.
- In the Maconaquah High School, Bunker Hill, Ind., students are allowed 10 days' absence per semester. Not counted in the 10 days are absences for personal illness requiring a physician's care, death and funeral of a family member, medical and dental appointments, school sponsored or authorized activities, religious observances and court appearances.
- 15 absences per semester: Brandon High School, Ortonville, Mich., allows a total of 15 excused and unexcused absences in a semester before a student loses credit for a class. The district policy notes, however, that the student has the right to appeal to a committee consisting of a counselor acting for the student, one administrator and five teachers selected from the staff at large.
- 27 days per year: The Firth (Idaho) School District #59 says no student shall receive credit for the year if he misses more than 27 days of school. In the case of minicourses, a student shall not miss more than four days per semester or seven days per quarter. Exceptions must be presented to the board of trustees along with proof of just cause for the exception.
- 31 days per year: A new board policy adopted for the 1978-79 school year in the Lima (Ohio) School District made "adequate attendance" a factor in the district's promotion and graduation requirements. Students who are absent from school or class for 31 days or more in a year's time for reasons other than medical or suspension cannot receive credit. Absences of 16 days in one-semester courses will result in loss of credit. Students absent from school because of official school suspension are considered legally absent.
- 15 percent per semester: At Riverside High School, Dearborn, Mich., any secondary student absent from any class in excess of 15 percent of any semester cannot receive credit for the course. No distinction is made between excused and unexcused absences. Only officially approved absences for school sponsored activities are not included in the 15 percent limit.
- 15 percent per semester: The Independent School District of Boise City, Idaho, requires students to attend 85 percent of the classes for a course to be given credit. Any student who is absent 15 percent or more cannot receive credit for a class unless extenuating circumstances exist (e.g., serious illness certified by a medical doctor or the school nurse or classes missed due to school related activities).

A Positive Twist to a Minimum Attendance Policy

Mount Pleasant (Pa.) Area High School is one of many schools in the country now following a minimum attendance rule. Basically, it requires that students attend at least 80 percent of the quarter. They cannot be absent more than nine days in any given quarter without jeopardy to their school career.

Mount Pleasant built in a slightly different twist to encourage good attendance. The district explains it this way: Students must successfully complete a specific number of units of study to graduate, according to standards established by the state. The district adds another requirement: a minimum 80 percent attendance record. In other words, no official credit will be entered on a permanent record card if the student misses more than 20 percent of the classes for a quarter. Below-par attendance would earn the student a "No Credit," regardless of academic performance. Students cannot receive a "Failure" on permanent record cards based on absences in excess of 20 percent. On the other hand, students who meet attendance requirements but fail a course in terms of academic performance may receive a D at the discretion of the teacher.

As part of the 80 percent attendance requirement, the district includes any vacation taken by the student during regular school time, suspensions, class cuts and truancy. Lateness to class by 20 minutes or more also is counted as absenteeism.

A "No Credit" in any quarter or any semester may be redeemed the following quarter or semester, or the course may be repeated the following year. Such a "No Credit" is redeemed by maintaining a passing grade and at least 80 percent attendance for each remaining quarter.

If a "No Credit" is earned in the final quarter of a course, the course must be repeated. If this should occur in a year-long course, the second semester is repeated.

A student who is absent a total of 40 days or more for the year automatically fails the course. Another rule: if a student receives three "No Credit" recognition quarters in a full-year course, no credit is given for the entire year.

The Mount Pleasant policy gives teachers some additional powers to hold down absenteeism and reduce class cutting. The policy states: "This policy does not restrict teachers as to what action they may take with students who are absent less than nine days (the maximum that can be missed per school quarter). Teachers are in no way restricted from exercising their own action in regard to student cuts as long as such action does not violate the rights of students."

Logistics of Attendance

Various school districts include suggestions in policy statements and guidelines for avoiding legal problems and improving attendance. Here are some examples:

Teachers can help. The Hauppauge (N.Y.) High School faculty handbook provides specific directions for teachers to improve attendance. Teachers are reminded "to be at their homerooms before the bell and to stand in the doorway directing students in the hall to get to their homeroom before the late bell." In addition, the teachers are told that they, not students, are responsible for attendance. In other words, they should ascertain that students are actually in the class. They are advised not to base attendance reports on hearsay or conjecture.

Telephone notification of absence is in, notes are out in many districts, including the Scottsdale Unified School District #48, Phoenix. Its policy says: "Only telephone calls to the school prior to or on the actual day of absence and no later than 3 p.m. can be accepted in order to count an absence as excused."

Who can approve absences? A North Carolina district found it necessary to add this directive to its rules governing attendance: "Parents very often telephone the school with various requests that pupils be excused. The secretary is not authorized to assume any legal responsibility in this matter, but acts only as a bearer of information to the principal or to the teacher in the absence of the principal. The excusing of pupils is not the prerogative of the secretary."

John Henry had better be John Henry. Students in Green Bay, Wis., can be given four detentions for forging a note or faking a phone call reporting absence.

Students Beyond the Compulsory Attendance Age

Most states require youth between the ages of 7 and 16 to attend school. Eleven states require attendance starting at age 6; another four specify age 8. Two states (Arkansas and Louisiana) require attendance to age 15. Compulsory attendance to age 17 applies in six states: Maine, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Texas and Virginia. Age 18 is the limit in another six states: Hawaii, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah and Washington.

School district policies reviewed for this **Critical Issues Report** generally did not specify any different standards for students beyond the age of compulsory attendance. Some did, however. Examples of the variations found in the policies follow:

Standards are the same: The Franklin County (Ky.) School District allows pupils between the ages of 16 and 21 to continue in school "as long as their behavior is acceptable, they are making satisfactory academic progress in terms of their ability, and their attendance is regular as judged by the same standards as for those who are covered by the compulsory attendance law."

Marriage = emancipation: In Louisiana, compulsory school attendance applies to students between the ages of 7 and 15. But, as one parish (district) notes: "Marriage of minors under the age of 16 results in their emancipation; hence, there is no person in charge or control of them and no method or procedure by which their attendance in school can be compelled."

Irregular attendance — out: The Bismarck (N.D.) Board of Education says "students over 16 years of age who do not attend regularly and are absent without providing an acceptable excuse for such absence may, at the discretion of the superintendent, be dropped from the rolls."

No unexcused absences: The Kettering (Ohio) School District says: "Although the 18-year-old is at the age of majority and therefore can legally make decisions independently of his parents, the 18-year-old must abide by the school rules required of all students. Therefore, if he chooses to attend school, then unexcused absences are not acceptable. If the 18-year-old signs his own excuse note, the principal may confirm this excuse with the parents. If, in the

judgment of the principal, the 18-year-old has developed a pattern of nonattendance, the principal should schedule a conference with the teacher, the 18-year-old and himself. In this conference, the 18-year-old is presented the option of attending school regularly or withdrawing from school. If the 18-year-old refuses either option, the principal may suspend or the superintendent may expel, if due process procedures are followed."

Three unexcused absences: In the Shelby County (Tenn.) Schools, this policy applies: "Any student having passed the compulsory attendance age will be dropped from the rolls after three consecutive unexcused absences, or an aggregate of five unexcused absences from class or school."

Six unexcused absences: The Ligonier Valley (Pa.) School District says the same attendance regulations apply to all students, regardless of age. This means the parent of a pupil, age 17 or older, who has three unexcused absences shall receive a warning letter. The fourth unexcused absence results in a parental conference; the fifth, an appearance by the student and his parents before the board of education. With the sixth unexcused absence, the student can be expelled from school.

Out on the 20th day: In the Exeter (N.H.) School District, students who are over age 16 will be dropped from the school rolls effective the 20th day of consecutive absence "unless a clear understanding with parents" is achieved before the 20th day.

Who Excuses an 18-Year-Old?

That depends. Some districts say he can do it; others make parents responsible. Some allow the 18-year-old to do it, but reserve the right to verify excuses with parents. Here's a sampling of board policies and district regulations:

18 or married — student can do it, if not living at home: The Des Moines (Iowa) Public Schools says a student of majority age — 18 years or older or married — who is not living with the student's parents or guardians may present his or her own excuse for absence without parental verification.

We'll check on questionable absences, 18 or not: The Chagrin Falls (Ohio) High School says all attendance policies apply to the 18-year-old with the exception that parent notes are not required. The school says, however, that it reserves the right to check with parents at any time a questionable absence is involved.

If you're on your own, you can excuse yourself: The Sioux City (Iowa) Schools note that 18-year-old students "not dependent on their parents for financial support" may tender their own excuses.

18-year-olds given an option: In the Scottsdale Unified School District #48, Phoenix, parents or guardians are obligated to telephone the school attendance office prior to or on the actual day of an absence, no later than 3 p.m. In addition, the district policy notes: "Eighteen-year-olds, upon request, may assume this responsibility . . . and also may excuse themselves before the close of the school day, provided permission is received from the principal or his designee."

Verification is up to the student: The Hacienda La Puente Unified School District, La Puente, Calif., bases its provision for 18-year-olds on state law. It says: "For purposes of verification, with respect to his own absences from school, a student 18 years of age or over shall have all of the responsibilities and powers which, in the case of a minor, would be charged to the parent, guardian or other person having charge or control of the minor."

Truancy

Most school districts define truancy as absence without the consent of parents or guardians. Many districts extend the basic definition, however, to cover a multitude of student absences. The Independent School District of Boise City, Idaho, for example, says truancy includes:

- Absences from school or from class after the student has arrived at school and left without the permission of a school official.
- Any absence which has not been excused either by oral or written communication within two school days after the student's return.
- Absenteeism from any class without an excuse.

Independent School District #518, Worthington, Minn., says a student is truant if absent without the approval of parents and the school. A student also is truant if parents do

not call on the day of absence. An exception is made for parents who are unable to call. They are required to verify the absence in a note sent with the child on the first day of return to school.

In the Mt. Vernon (Ill.) Township Schools, students who leave school because of illness must first secure permission. Otherwise, they are considered truant.

More districts are closing loopholes in attendance policies and regulations through closer scrutiny of excuses and by forbidding traditional "cut" days. Two examples: In the Camas (Wash.) School District, truancy is defined as absence from school without excuse for a whole day, half day or class period. The district says further that a student will be counted as truant if school officals have evidence of a truancy, regardless of a parental excuse. The Franklinville (N.J.) School District says in its rules and regulations on attendance that it "cannot and will not condone any involvement in Junior or Senior Cut Days. This type of day will be considered as truancy."

How School Districts Punish Truancy

What happens when a student is truant depends largely on where that student goes to school. The outcome may be simply after-school detention or a scolding or it may be more swift and certain disciplinary action. An example of the latter is included in the policy of the Oxford Academy and Central School, Oxford, N.Y. It suggests this remedy: A student who is truant shall be automatically suspended from school for a period of up to five days. And, it adds: Infractions of this type become a permanent part of the student's record.

Make-up privileges may be denied under the policies followed by Martinsville (Ind.) High School and the Grand Rapids, Mich., elementary and secondary schools, among others. In the Mt. Vernon (Ill.) Township Schools, truants are not permitted to make up work "unless the teacher deems it appropriate to have the work completed." If the work is made up, credit is recorded and averaged into the final grade. But it has to be made up in five days following the student's return to class, or a zero is averaged into the quarter grade.

Removal from class: Three truancies from one class in the Independent School District #719, Prior Lake, Minn., may cause the student to be removed from the class and assigned to the district's continuing education center. Minimum time in the center is five days. Students removed from class for truancy are not granted credit for the class, and anyone who is absent or truant is not permitted to participate in school activities that day or evening.

Policies of Limits

Many school districts have recently adopted or revised policies on truancy, reflecting the growing concern of administrators and school boards about student cutting. Several clear trends are evident in the newly revised policies. Uniform limits, clearly defining what school districts will tolerate, are emerging. Another trend: Many districts are building in what can only be termed "escalator clauses." They call for more severe punishment for offenses beyond a single incident or a minimum number and more required actions on the part of staff and parents to deal with truant students. The escalator clauses reflect school districts' concern not only with student welfare but also with legally required due process procedures.

Following are examples of policies of limits:

The policy followed at Cortland (N.Y.) Junior/Senior High School is simply stated. If a student is truant from class, the first through the third offense results in two detention assignments and notice to parents. On the fourth offense, the student is dropped from class and assigned to a study hall, and the parents are notified. "Repeated truancy from study hall or the homeroom is considered an act of insubordination and will result in suspension," the policy says.

The first occurrence of truancy in the DuPage County School District, Villa Park, Ill., results in notification of parents and a counseling session for the student, his parents and a school official. On the second offense, the school district uses an "appropriate support service" or alternative program for the student, and the parents are notified in writing. On the third and subsequent occurrences, the support service or alternative program continues; an initial referral form is sent to the county truancy office; and the parents are notified that they may be subject to conviction for a misdemeanor, punishable by 30 days in prison or a fine of up to $500. At the same time they are notified that the truant student may be held back because of "lack of educational growth."

Lisle (Ill.) Senior High School abandoned its practice of giving students detentions or suspensions for truancy when it adopted a new attendance procedure for the 1978-79 school year. Instead, it says, students would be withdrawn from class and a failing grade recorded upon the accumulation of an "excessive" number of truancies. "Before students are dropped from a class, there will be ample communication between home and school," the policy notes. Specifically, it calls for notification of the parents of a truant high school student by phone or mail for the first class-cutting incident, a conference with the student and parents on the second occurrence, a three-day suspension on the third incident. The student is dropped from the class and a failing grade recorded for a fourth truancy.

Three different discipline codes are followed in the Sioux City (Iowa) Community Schools: one each for elementary students, junior high students and senior high students. Each code outlines a policy of limits which includes prescribed disciplinary and administrative action for truancy, as follows:

Elementary Disciplinary Code: Truancy. Students who are truant shall be disciplined in the following manner:

1st offense: Talk with the student; parental contact is strongly encouraged.

2nd offense: Contact parents; students must make up an hour for each hour truant.

3rd offense: One-day in-school suspension.

4th offense: Three-day in-school suspension.

5th offense: Refer student to the board of education for disciplinary action.

Junior High Disciplinary Code: Truancy. Students who are truant shall be disciplined in the following manner:

1st offense: May assign make-up time, not to exceed five detention periods; counseling with the school counselor; conference with the parents.

2nd offense: Increased detention, not to exceed 10 detention periods; counseling; conference with the parents.

3rd offense: May be suspended one to three days; parental conference; warning that student shall be referred to the board of education for the next offense.

4th and all subsequent offenses: Refer to the board of educaton for disciplinary action.

Senior High Disciplinary Code: Truancy: Students who are truant shall be disciplined in the following manner:

1st offense: Make up time (one hour make-up for one hour truant); contact parents.

2nd offense: One-day suspension; call parents.

3rd offense: Three-day suspension; parent conference.

4th offense: Refer to the board of education for disciplinary action.

The Sioux City district also includes in the senior high school disciplinary code a separate section outlining the disciplinary actions to be followed if students leave the campus. (A closed campus is observed at all three of the district's high schools.) The disciplinary actions are as follows:

1st offense: One-hour detention; send a letter to the parents.

2nd offense: Two days in the In-School Suspension Room; parent conference.

3rd offense: Three days in the In-School Suspension Room; parent conference.

4th offense: Refer to the board of education for disciplinary action.

Policy of Limits and Escalation

The six-step truancy policy used by the Lodi (Wis.) School District presents one of the best examples of a policy that defines limits and also allows for escalation. Each unexcused absence beyond the first calls for greater effort on the part of the administration and the school board to deal with the truancy. Note, too, that each incident of unexcused absence requires two contacts with the parents, one by telephone, the other by letter. In addition, the policy requires the district to obtain outside counseling and help through the county social services department and the juvenile court system before resorting to expulsion. The policy allows for appeal of any disciplinary procedure to three levels: the high school principal, the superintendent and, finally, the board of education.

The six-step truancy policy does not apply to unexcused absences from study hall. Such absences are punishable by a two-hour detention. If the student fails to serve the detention, he is immediately suspended from school for one day.

The six-step truancy policy calls for the following:

First unexcused absence: Telephone contact with the parent; letter notifying parents of the truancy mailed home; counseling session between the student and the administration to explain the truancy policy. Depending upon the severity of the truancy, further punishment may or may not be given. The student will receive zeros in the classes missed.

Second unexcused absence: Telephone contact with the parent; letter notifying parent of the truancy mailed home; automatic two-hour detention. Failure to serve the detention results in an immediate one-day out-of-school suspension on the day following the missed detention session. Following a counseling session with the administraton, the student will schedule a conference with the guidance counselor. The student will receive zeros in the classes missed.

Third unexcused absence: Telephone contact with the parent; letter notifying the parent of the truancy mailed home; one day out-of-school suspension on the next school day following the unexcused absence. The student will receive zeros in all classes missed for the unexcused absence and in all classes for the suspension period. Notification of the truancy will be sent to the county social services department. As soon as possible following the unexcused absence, an attendance board meeting will be held consisting of the student, parent, assistant principal, principal, guidance counselor, superintendent, the teacher(s) involved in the absence and a school board member. The attendance board will review the student's status in school and attendance records.

Fourth unexcused absence: Telephone contact with the parent; letter notifying parent of the truancy mailed home. The student will serve a two-day out-of-school suspension on the next two consecutive school days following the unexcused absence. The student will receive zeros in classes missed for the unexcused absence and in all classes for the suspension period. Notification of the truancy will be sent to the county social services department, with an appointment set up for counseling between the student and a social worker.

Fifth unexcused absence: Telephone contact with the parent; letter notifying parent of the truancy mailed home. The student will serve a three-day out-of-school suspension on the next three consecutive school days following the unexcused absence. The student will receive zeros in classes missed for the unexcused absence and in all classes for the suspension period. Notification of the truancy will be sent to the county social services department. In addition, the district administration will petition the county juvenile court for a court appearance for the student and parent based upon failure to comply with the compulsory attendance law.

Sixth unexcused absence: Telephone contact with the parent; letter notifying parent of the truancy mailed home. The student will serve suspensions on all consecutive school days following the unexcused absences until the next scheduled meeting of the school board. At that meeting, the administration will recommend to the school board that the student be expelled from school for the remainder of the semester. The student and parent must be notified by certified mail about the charge being made and the expulsion proceedings.

Policies of Limits: Class Cutting

Example No. 1: Hauppage (N.Y.) High School. This high school adopted a new school policy on class cuts for the 1978-79 school year. It notes that three latenesses to a single class are charged as a cut and will be treated the same as a class cut. The procedure for class cuts is as follows:

1st cut: The teacher will discuss the cut with the student and mail home an illegal absence report.

2nd cut: The teacher will request a parent conference. If the parents do not schedule the conference within five days after notification, the principal will suspend the student from class until the conference is scheduled. At the conference, the principal will outline what will be required of the student to remain enrolled in the class. A contract agreeing to the requirements will be signed by student, parent and principal.

3rd and subsequent cuts: The student may be permanently withdrawn from the class. The policy notes that "such action may delay a student's graduation from high school."

Example No. 2: New Hope (Pa.) School District. This District considers cutting "a serious infraction of school rules." It says cutting not only impairs the educational process but prevents faculty and administration from rapidly locating students. The district's attendance policy outlines the following procedures to be used when students purposely miss class:

1st cut: The parents will be notified and the student will have one hour in detention.

2nd cut in the same subject in the same marking period: The student will receive up to a three-day suspension and will not be allowed to return to school until a parent-student-administration conference takes place. The student automatically and permanently suffers a one-quarter credit loss in the course. The district notes that loss of a quarter credit could prevent a marginal student from graduating. And, it says, since students must pass 5¼ credits, cumulatively, to be promoted, loss of credit could cause a student to be retained. "If credit is lost due to disciplinary action, the district notes further, "no rescheduling designed to make up the loss will be allowed."

3rd cut in the same subject in the same marking period: The student will receive up to a three-day suspension and not be allowed to return to school until a parent-student-administration conference is held. Further, the student will automatically and permanently suffer an additional one-quarter credit loss in the course, thus totaling one-half credit loss. (Most regular courses meet five times weekly, year long, and carry a value of one credit.)

4th cut in the same subject in the same marking period: The student will receive up to a three-day suspension and not be allowed to return to school until a parent-student-administration conference is held. Further, the student will lose all credit in the course and be assigned to a study hall. The student may request permission to remain in the course in a non-credit status.

Policies of Escalation: Teacher/Administrative Response

In some districts, new or revised school attendance policies and procedures outline specific steps that must be followed by teachers, administrators and other staff members in dealing with unexcused absences or truancy. Examples of such policies follow:

Example No. 1: Scottsdale Unified School District #48, Phoenix: In this district, a student may be dropped from a class for absences in excess of 10, if they could have been avoided "and if they have had a detrimental effect on the student's class performance."

The district requires that the following disciplinary procedures be followed regarding unexcused absences from class:

1st absence: The teacher will speak to the student regarding the absence.

2nd absence: The school will notify the student's parents of the absence. The student's counselor will be apprised of the situation.

3rd absence: The administrative office will contact parents to warn them that the student will be dropped from the class after a fourth unexcused absence. The student's counselor will be apprised of the situation.

4th absence: The administration will drop the student from the course. The principal will evaluate how much credit should be awarded to the student.

The district policy notes that any decision to drop a student is subject to appeal by him or his parents.

If a student's total number of classes is reduced to three, an administrator must hold a conference with the student, his parents and his counselor. (This part of the policy does not apply to seniors.) The purpose of the conference is to inform the student that he will be removed from the regular program on his campus and recommended for placement in an alternative program — if he is dropped from another class.

Example No. 2: Glenview (Ill.) School District. This district adopted new, detailed procedures to be followed in all cases involving truancy. Highlights of the procedures follow:

1st offense: The teacher must report the truancy to the instructional supervisor and the parents (via letter). The teacher is required to explain the attendance policy to the truant student. The instructional supervisor must also contact the parents by letter and send a copy of the letter to the dean of students and the student's counselor.

2nd offense: The teacher must inform the student of a 4 percent grade reduction for the current marking period and report the truancy to the instructional supervisor. The supervisor contacts the parents and sends copies to the dean of students and the student's counselor.

3rd offense: At this point, the dean of students becomes involved. He assigns the student to the Learning Adjustment Center for three days and arranges a conference with the parents. The student's counselor devel-

ops and implements a counseling plan and conducts a conference with the parents prior to the student's reentrance into the regular school program.

4th offense: The counselor, upon notification of the truancy, removes the student from the class register, assigns the student to a study hall and enters an F grade for the course on the student's records. He notifies the parents and the principal of his actions. If removal of the student from the class results in the student being enrolled in fewer than 15 mods of class, the principal recommends to the superintendent that the student be assigned to the high school evening school. The superintendent, in turn, makes the same recommendation to the school board. It makes the final decision on placement.

Example No. 3: The Wilmington (Ohio) School District. This district believes that absenteeism often is a symptom of complex problems in the home or school environment. For that reason, it encourages all administrators, teachers, counselors and attendance officers to work together to alleviate situations which may contribute to absenteeism.

At the elementary level, the district recommends that the teacher make the first contact with the parent regarding an absence. If absenteeism persists, the principal should make the second contact. After that, the district recommends intervention by the attendance officer.

At the junior high school level, the first contact with parents should be made by the counselor or principal, with additional contact and follow-up by the attendance officer. The district recommends a combination of efforts (attendance officer, counselors and principal) at the senior high school level.

No improvement in attendance should trigger subsequent contacts within five to 10 school days, including home visits, phone calls and notes, the district guidelines state. During this period, an attempt should be made to determine the cause of the absenteeism and to make appropriate referrals. If the cause is truancy, referral should be made to school administrators and ultimately to municipal courts; emotional problems should be referred to guidance counselors or a mental health clinic; medical problems to the school nurse or a private physician; other home problems, to the appropriate agency such as one serving children.

If the attendance problem still persists and the student has been absent 10 to 15 days, the attendance officer should mail a warning letter to parents advising them of possible legal action, the Ohio district suggests. An interim step it recommends at this point is to send a second warning letter signed by the superintendent. The full legal process should be activated, starting with an official warning sent by certified mail to the parents and the filing of truancy charges in municipal court. The charges may be deferred, the district says, if the student returns to school.

The Wilmington board of education notes in the policy that it is "only a guide to handling attendance problems and should not be interpreted as inflexible rules." it adds: "The nature of each case will determine the way it is handled within these general guidelines."

Here's what happened, honest. . .

Notes from Home Aren't Always Believable

Principals find they can't always believe — or understand — notes sent from home. Here are some of the more intriguing excuses received by one school district:

Dear School: Please ackuse John for being absent on Jan. 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33.

Mary could not come to school because she is bothered by very close veins.

Please excuse Gloria. She has been sick and under the doctor.

Please excuse Joyce from P.E. for a few days. Yesterday she fell out of a tree and misplaced her hip.

My daughter was absent yesterday because she was tired. She spent the weekend with the Marines.

Please excuse Jimmy for being. It was his father's fault.

Policies of Discretionary Authority

Some district policies allow school authorities considerable discretion in handling attendance problems. In the Wichita (Kans.) School District, for example, board policy requires school personnel to assist parents in meeting compulsory attendance requirements by: "providing an educational program geared to the interests and needs of pupils, maintaining attendance records, notifying parents of pupil absences, arranging conferences to deal with serious attendance problems and reporting truancy as required by law."

To implement the board policy, the school administration adopted procedures which require principals and teachers to assume responsibility for attendance. Specifically, the procedures require all instructors to assume the responsibility of notifying parents when a student has accumulated up to five unexcused absences or tardies.

The administrative procedures allow building administrators and individual teachers a wide range of corrective measures for unexcused absences, including conferences, supplemental and make-up assignments, supplemental and

Truancy Program Axed by Proposition 13

Passage of California's Proposition 13 canceled an effective night caller program to reduce truancy. When the budget ax fell, the Saddleback Valley Unified School District found it could not afford the half-time classified employee who came in between 4:30 and 7:30 p.m. to call parents of students absent from Mission Viejo High School.

The night calls were tried, says Don Martin, dean of students, because the majority of parents (both mothers and fathers) work during the day and are difficult to reach by phone. Only parents who had failed to notify the school that their child was home were called in the program.

The program cut truancy by 20 percent, Martin says. On a sample day, 217 of the district's 2,500 students were absent. Eighty parents phoned the school, and the night caller phoned the remainder. The night calls successfully reached 87 homes. Most parents (78) reported their child had been home ill; nine parents said they did not know of the absence or where their child had been. Those parents were asked to call the school the next day with an explanation.

The vast majority of parents were appreciative of the school's efforts, Martin reports. In place of the night caller, the district said it would consider volunteer callers, a point system for weighting excused and unexcused absences for grading, or a coded phone answering service that would enable parents to check on their child's attendance.

make-up time, a school service assignment and "perhaps, the lowering of a course grade or loss of credit." Failure on the part of a student to respond to the corrective efforts, the procedures say, "may necessitate the application of short-term suspension or withdrawal procedures."

The administrative procedures note further that withdrawal may be considered "if a pupil's attendance becomes irregular and infrequent and indicates a lack of commitment to the degree that maintaining the pupil's name on the class roster is unreasonable." Before a student is withdrawn, however, the district requires that:

- There is evidence of effort on the part of school personnel to encourage regular attendance.
- A conference is scheduled with the parent and pupil to advise all parties that withdrawal is imminent unless marked improvement is shown.
- A reasonable educational alternative is offered, e.g., reenrollment the following semester, referral to a study hall, night school, correspondence center, independent study center or special learning center.

The principal is given discretionary authority under the policy adopted by the board of trustees of the Independent School District of Boise City, Idaho. The policy states that the principal shall take such action as is deemed appropriate and most effective to rehabilitate a student who violates attendance or discipline regulations. Among the options the principal may use are the following: suspension, requiring conferences with parents, revoking student privileges to attend and participate in school activities and requiring make-up work during and after school hours.

The policy requires the principal to notify parents "of any serious violation of the regulations and to inform both the student and parents of what action may be expected in the event of future violations."

In the Weld County School District, Greeley, Colo., partial day or class absences on the secondary level are considered an individual building matter "requiring the coordinated efforts of principal, assistant principal, counselors, nurse and faculty." Absences of 10 days or more from any class during the quarter, moreover, may be sufficient grounds for denial of credit by the instructor, subject to approval of the building principal.

Tardiness

Many of the policies, regulations and guidelines submitted for this **Critical Issues Report** include new or updated material on tardiness. This indicates it is becoming a more serious problem in the nation's schools. Another indication: more than one out of every three administrators (34.9 percent) responding to the **Critical Issues Survey** reported "chronic tardiness" as an attendance problem.

The nation's school districts do not use or follow a common definition of tardiness or "tardies." Instead, a reference to either term in school policies, regulations or guidelines may mean morning arrival time, after-lunch return to school or, most frequently, class arrival time.

Depending on the school district, a student may be considered tardy if he is:

- One minute late.
- Three minutes late.
- Five minutes late.
- Ten minutes late.
- Twenty minutes late.
- Misses more than one-half of the class period (which may be considered truancy in some districts).
- Is not in the classroom when the class period starts.
- Is not in his seat in the classroom when the class period starts.
- Is not in his seat in the classroom with assigned materials ready, when the class period starts.

The Chagrin Falls (Ohio) High School issued a revised code of student conduct in September 1978, which included new guidelines on tardiness. The guidelines advise students to arrive at school at least 10 minutes before school begins to allow for visits to lockers and the library and to see friends before going to homeroom. "A student is to be in the homeroom at 8 a.m. ready to begin the day; arrival after that time is considered being tardy," the guidelines advise.

The guidelines list 12 reasons for excused tardiness to school and 11 reasons for unexcused tardiness. The reasons for excused tardiness are similar to those usually given for an excused (legal) absence. These reasons are listed for unexcused tardiness: car trouble (other than involvement in an auto accident); oversleeping; missing the bus; traffic jam; staying out of school an unnecessary length of time because of doctor's appointment, job interview, or driver's license exam; babysitting in a non-emergency situation; running non-emergency errands for parents or others; trips to barber or beauty shop; hitchhiking; "couldn't get a ride"; staying out too late working, studying, socializing.

A review of the policies, regulations and guidelines from other school districts indicates almost all districts allow a student to be tardy to a teacher's class, if the tardiness is caused by another teacher. In that case, students are advised to get a tardy excuse from the teacher who held them up before going to the next class.

Another generalization about tardiness: District policies consider tardiness a classroom management problem, one that must be handled by the classroom teacher. Sending a tardy student to the principal's office is discouraged in most districts, unless a student has an excessive number of tardies and the teacher cannot handle the problem.

How Should Tardiness Be Handled?

Here's what various school districts suggest in their policies, regulations and guidelines to teachers and students:

Tardiness to class of more than 20 minutes is treated as an absence in Parshall, N.D. It requires an excuse from home.

Four unexcused tardies to class or to school in one semester is considered a one-day absence in Wapakoneta (Ohio) Senior High School.

In Wahpeton, N.D., students are given one hour of detention after school for any unexcused tardiness.

Tardiness of five minutes to a first-period class may result in an after-school detention in Bloomington (Ill.) High School. Any student who is more than five minutes late must report to an attendance center, where a school official will determine if the tardiness constitutes an unapproved absence of the classes missed. Four unapproved tardies can result in a withdrawal from class. Examples of unapproved tardiness in the district include: oversleeping, missing the bus, car trouble, running errands for parents or taking parents to work.

At Madison High School, Adrian, Mich., a first tardy to class results in an oral warning from the teacher. The student is admitted. A second offense is handled the same way, but the district's policy also requires the teacher to call parents, send a note home or detain the student after school (keeping in mind that students must be given one-day advance warning to arrange transportation). On the third offense the teacher sends the student to the principal's office along with a note indicating what action has been taken. The principal disciplines the student, usually by assigning him to the "Special Services Room" for one day. The same action follows the next offense, except that the student is assigned to the Special Services Room for two days. On the fifth and succeeding offenses, students may be suspended for three days for each offense.

The high school has a 20-day absence limit. Incidents of tardiness, starting with the third offense, are counted as part of the 20 days. Arriving to class 10 minutes late counts as a skip, and an official absenteeism is charged against the 20-day limit. Students guilty of skipping are not allowed back in class until the principal has resolved the matter.

Tardies to class are considered "a serious disruption in the educational process" by the Independent School District of Boise City, Idaho. The district's guidelines suggest that tardies be dealt with as follows: the teacher should inform the student's parents or guardians and school counselors of any tardiness (up to three tardies in a semester). When the student accumulates five tardies, he should be referred to the assistant principal for further action, which may involve major disciplinary action (e.g., informal suspension, referral to the proper law enforcement authority), further parent contact or suspension proceedings.

A tardiness policy, to be implemented at the discretion of principals, accompanied an open campus policy for senior high schools in Casper, Wyo. A pass issued to students during registration enables them to leave campus during the lunch hour. The policy notes, however, that a student could automatically lose his pass for the remainder of the school year if tardy after lunch more than twice during a six-week period or if found on another campus during his lunch period.

In the Waverly Schools, Lansing, Mich., unexcused tardiness to class is dealt with according to building policy. The district recommends two alternatives for a high school student who is tardy to a given class four times during a quarter: assignment to one session of Saturday School or placement on the "truancy level," with punishment ranging

from a letter home for the first offense to a three-day suspension for a fourth offense and a much longer suspension for a fifth offense.

Tardiness in the Libby (Mont.) Senior High School is handled by each teacher. The student policy handbook says, however, that "if the measures employed by the teacher do not correct the problem, the tardy student will be referred to the assistant principal." Three tardies are considered the equivalent of one absence. Tardiness of 20 minutes or more to a class may, upon the discretion of the teacher, be considered an absence. The teacher is responsible for notifying the student when such incidents are recorded as absences.

If you're not on time, you can't get into class, under the guidelines of District #51, Cumberland, Maine. The district requires that students who are tardy for school must report to the assistant principal's office for a pass, but they must wait for the next class. The district's policy says that it is "trying to prevent annoying class disruptions and discourtesy to staff." Tardiness to class must be handled by the teacher. The district's guidelines advise that such tardiness "should be dealt with fairly and consistently."

In the Des Moines (Iowa) Independent Community School District, handling tardiness to class is "the direct responsibility of the teacher concerned," the district's policy says in bold type. Tardiness may be handled with detention, the policy says.

In School District RJ-2, Wray, Colo., students are required to make up 30 minutes for each tardy to school. In case of chronic tardiness, the student is to receive no credit for class assignments missed, according to district policy. When a student is tardy in excess of 30 minutes, make-up time after school is at the discretion of the building principal.

Teachers must admit all tardy students to class, says the policy of the Scottsdale Unified School District #48, Phoenix. It notes that grades in a course should not be reduced by tardies or absences from class. "However, since tardies or absences will affect the learning of the student, the interaction during class discussions and the learning of the ability to function in the business world, the overall evaluation of the student may be adversely affected." Three tardies are the equivalent of one unexcused absence and, under the district's policy, the absent student must make up missed work but no credit is given.

Make-Up Work

Students who miss school may or may not be able to make up missed classwork. Make-up work is considered a right by some districts, a privilege by others, judging by the provisions of school board policies submitted for this **Critical Issues Report.**

Some generalizations hold. One example: Students usually have to submit make-up work in advance of a prearranged absence (e.g., a family vacation). Usually, they have to submit it promptly following any other legal absence. How prompt must they be? The most common requirement is that make-up work must be completed in an amount of time equivalent to the student's absence, e.g., following a two-day absence, a student would have two days to make up work upon return to school. Some few districts are lax about time requirements, and students have several weeks or until the end of the semester to submit make-up work.

Other generalizations:

- Make-up work and credit for it are allowed when the student is legally absent. If the absence is considered illegal, many districts do not allow students to make up work. Those that do, however, often do not grant credit.
- Students must take the initiative in finding out what the make-up work will be. In some districts, teachers of elementary and middle school students are charged with taking the initiative if the absence is legal, while at the secondary level, the responsibility most often belongs to the student.
- Many districts try to make clear in their policies that make-up work does not fully compensate for what the student has missed in the way of discussion, interaction, socialization, special instructional techniques, such as films.

Following are some representative statements illustrating various views on make-up work:

In Bloomfield Hills, Mich., teachers are obligated to assist students in making up classwork missed because of excused absences. The district policy notes: "The teacher may require that class time not be used for arranging or completing make-up work and may designate test make-up to occur in study hall or before or after school or during the student's lunch period." The policy also notes that "teachers are not obligated to assist in the make-up of classwork missed because of unexcused absences unless specifically directed to do so by the building principal."

In the Scottsdale Unified School District #48, Phoenix, missed work due to excused absences may be made up and full credit given for it — if it's in on time. Students must initiate the make-up scheduling for the work missed; they are permitted the same amount of time to complete the work as they were absent. Work missed due to

suspension or unexcused absence must be made up, but no credit is given.

The Independent School District of Boise City, Idaho, allows two days' make-up time for each day absent. Additional time may be granted at the principal's discretion "under extenuating circumstances."

In the Chesterfield County (Va.) Schools, high school students (grades 9-12) may make up work only for excused absences. (Truancy and suspension are considered unexcused.) Middle school students (grades 6-8) are permitted to make up work for all classes missed within five days of the return to school whether the absence is excused or unexcused. The district notes that extenuating circumstances may be considered in extending the time limit for make-up. High school students cannot be promoted or receive credit for a course if absenteeism exceeds 9 days in one semester.

In the Byers (Colo.) School District 32J, the teacher may use discretion in deciding to give make-up work after the fourth absence. The district policy notes that six absences within a semester in any one class will cause the loss of credit for the class, unless the absences are caused by extenuating circumstances.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg (N.C.) Board of Education provides that in the case of excused absences for junior high students, the teacher is responsible for approaching the student and directing make-up of homework, tests and classwork. "Full credit should be awarded," the policy states. If the absence is unexcused, the responsibility for contacting the teacher and making up missed work shifts to the student. "Full credit should be given for the completed work if it is satisfactory," the policy says. It notes that "grades are not to be used as a means of punishment for unexcused absences." At the senior high level, a student whose absence is excused is responsible for approaching the teacher "promptly" about make-up work. In the case of unexcused absence, students may lose their make-up privileges. The deciding factor is this: "When agreement can be reached among the student, the teacher and the administration, students may be permitted to make up work." The provision is specifically directed toward absences due to deliberate class cuts.

Appeal of Attendance Procedures

What if a student or his parents disagree with a ruling on attendance or an attendance policy? Say the student has been marked illegally absent three times and, under district policy, suspension or another disciplinary measure is called for — but, the student or his parents claim the absences were legal? What's an administrator to do?

Districts handle such situations in various ways. Some board policies cover contingencies by stating that students are entitled to due process in any disciplinary procedures. Others have set up specific appeal boards and procedures to handle attendance disputes. Examples follow.

The Colorado Springs (Colo.) School District allows for appeal whenever promotion is denied, credit is withheld, or a grade is affected as a result of an attendance related matter. A student may not be penalized while an appeal is under way.

The student may appeal a decision to four levels:

Level 1: A written request is presented to the building principal. Within three days, a hearing committee composed of all concerned parties will give a written decision.

Level 2: Three days after receipt of the written decision from level 1, a written request to consider the appeal can be made to the appropriate administrative principal. The principal schedules a meeting of the concerned teacher, student and parent within five days. Three days later, he must issue a written decision.

Level 3: A written request of appeal may be made to the superintendent within three days after the administrative principal has issued his decision. The superintendent follows the same procedure as used by the administrative principal and issues a written decision within three days.

Level 4: A written request of appeal may be forwarded to the superintendent within three days after the Level 3 decision. The request is considered by the board of education at the next regularly scheduled meeting or at a special meeting. Its decision must follow in writing within two weeks.

The attendance policy of the Wheatland and Glendo (Wyo.) High Schools allows for a "Board of Adjustment" to hear and render decisions in disputes involving the attendance policy.

The board is comprised of two faculty members selected by the high school faculty, two pupils selected by the high school student council and the high school principal. The principal serves as chairman and votes only in case of a tie.

Grievances can be initiated by either a pupil or a faculty member, with application made to the principal's office for a hearing. Three board members are required to be present for a hearing, and it must be called within five school days of application. A decision is rendered by simple majority, and it may be appealed to the county board of education.

Parents may appeal an absence which is considered unexcused, under the attendance guidelines of the Okemos (Mich.) High School.

At the school, a first unexcused absence results in a parent contact. The second unexcused absence calls for the teacher to make a referral to the counselor, who confers with the student. The counselor, in turn, notifies the parents. The third unexcused absence can result in removal from class and a grade of F on the student's record. An appeal by parents is possible upon notification of the third unexcused absence.

If the parents activate the appeal process, the student remains in class until the appeal process is exhausted. It works like this: The parents appeal first to the principal, who schedules a hearing within two days of the request. A decision must be rendered within two days. If the parents are not satisfied, they may appeal to the superintendent. A conference is scheduled with the parents "as soon as possible," and the superintendent's decision is rendered within two days of the conference. The third appeal may be made to a three-member committee of the board of education. The committee must render its decision within two days.

An appeals process of sorts is used with students who skip class by the Independent School District #347, Willmar, Minn. In order to be allowed back into a class, a student who has skipped a class two times attends a reinstatement conference. The participants may include the classroom teacher, the student, the parent and the assistant principal. The principal and a counselor also may be asked to sit in on the conference.

If a consensus can be reached in the conference and the student makes a commitment, reinstatement is made. The next skip, however, results in automatic termination of the class and a grade of "No Credit." If the committee cannot reach a consensus in the conference, the student should be offered an alternative program, according to district guidelines.

In the Monroe (Mich.) Public Schools, students who miss the same class period more than 11 times per semester may lose class credit and be required to drop the class and report to a study hall or alternative program.

Before any action involving loss of credit or removal from class is taken, however, a review board evaluates the student's case. Each review board (the district has four) consists of an assistant principal, two faculty members and the student's guidance counselor (non-voting). Parents are invited to attend the evaluations. They also are given the option of vetoing a review. Each of the student's teachers is required to submit a recommendation to the review board, which includes comments regarding the student's attitude and scholastic ability as they affect class work.

Attendance: Effect on Grades

One of the most controversial areas regarding school attendance is that of using punitive measures to punish truancy. Recently, controversy has surrounded implementation of policies calling for a reduction in grades or denial of credit solely on the basis of a certain number of absences.

The Illinois Legislature amended compulsory attendance requirements to define more clearly how school districts are to deal with habitual or chronic truancy. The amendments require schools to use supportive services and other school resources to correct chronic truant behavior. "Chronic truancy is not to be treated punitively until all positive resources have been provided," the amendments state.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals reviewed the issue of grade reduction in its publication, *A Legal Memorandum*, October 1977 (NASSP, 1904 Association Dr., Reston, Va. 22091; 6 pp; 50¢ prepaid).

NASSP said generally that "courts are more likely to be concerned with dismissals, failures or grade reductions of students in medical schools or other professional schools than with similar actions at the secondary or even college level."

Automatic grade reduction for truancy will usually be permitted if it can be shown to have a reasonable educational relationship to the offense, NASSP said. It advised schools to demonstrate this relationship. It suggested:

- The rules should set forth the educational rationale for grade reduction (i.e., that attendance and participation in class are necessary to academic achievement).
- The rule should be made known to all students.
- The policy should not be so harsh as to be difficult to justify on an educational basis.

As a final precaution, school districts should check at-

tendance policies and procedures, particularly those tying grades to attendance, with legal counsel or with their state education agency.

Here are sample policies currently in use:

Zero for unexcused absence; school must document effort to change non-attender to attender in the Prince George's County Public Schools, Upper Marlboro, Md. This suburban district states that an unexcused absence on the day a recorded grade is given for a task or test shall result in an automatic zero or E grade for the particular task or test. It adds that the accumulation of 10 days of unexcused absence per semester or 20 days per year by students in grades 9-12 shall result in no grade for a course. The district notes, further, that the policy applies *only if* the school can document that on at least three separate occasions, it has notified and discussed with both the pupil and the parent that unexcused absences have been noted and recorded; that the pupil stands in peril of the consequences of no grade and hence no credit for courses; and that an offer is made to explore and remediate causes of unexcused absences. "Exceptions to the maximum number of unexcused absences per semester may be made only by the principal," according to the policy. It also requires that secondary students be notified of the number of accumulated absences at the time course grades are given.

If nonattendance prevents mastery, an adjusted course grade may be warranted. The Colorado Springs (Colo.) Board of Education considers achievement the chief criterion for determining pupil progress. The board policy notes, however: "There is a relationship between attendance and grades; therefore, if a student fails to make up required course work which he/she missed because of absences, the course requirements are not fulfilled and grades may be adjusted." Student grades, it continues, "may not be lowered solely on the basis of attendance. When it can be shown that nonattendance prevented the mastery of required skills or knowledge, an adjusted course grade may be warranted." The board policy also specifies that students who have been absent should be given the opportunity to make up work missed, with the exception of cases of truancy. If required course work is not made up when missed, in accordance with school guidelines, the board says, a lowered grade may result.

Grades depend partially on attendance in the Ligonier Valley (Pa.) School District. The district requires students to attend at least 80 percent of the total number of scheduled student days for each report card period. Similarly, the district requires attendance of at least 80 percent of scheduled student days for the year to establish eligibility to receive passing grades. Failing grades may be given for absence of 20 percent or more. The district's rationale: "The purpose of this policy is to place more of the responsibility for attendance on the student by making the earning of grades and credit directly contingent on regular attendance. This is based on the premise that each class period contains instructional material or activities that are of significant importance to the student." In-school suspension is not counted in calculating the 80 percent requirement for the grading period, but out-of-school suspension is.

The Walla Walla (Wash.) School District says "students' grades may be affected by attendance or tardiness if daily attendance and participation is related to achieving the instructional objectives of the course; the principal has approved the practice; and each teacher informs students at the beginning of the course that each absence or tardiness will affect the course grade." The district's policy also notes that students with an excused absence shall be permitted to make up all missed assignments outside of class "under reasonable conditions and time limits established by the appropriate teachers. Further, an unexcused student's grade shall not be affected, if no graded activity or assignment is missed."

Credit may be reduced under 12-16 day policy. The Springfield (Mich.) High School follows a 12-16 day attendance policy that limits a student to 11 days' absence from a class per semester before having credit reduced. Upon reaching the 12th day, the credit a student earns may be reduced by one-half. When a student reaches the 16th day of absence, he may be removed from a class and a grade of E recorded. All absences from class, except for related school activities, are counted toward the 12-16 day policy. In-school suspension is not figured in the limit; out-of-school suspension is. Absences due to family trips or appointments with doctors or dentists are excused absences, but they count toward the 16-day limit, unless the principal makes an exception. Truancy is considered separately. The first offense results in a consultation between principal and student and notification of parents. On the second offense, a student may be suspended for one day and the parents contacted, or the student may be assigned to a week of "7th hours" (detention). A third truancy offense results in a three-day suspension from school and all activities and a parent/principal conference. Truancies in excess of three may be punished by an indefinite suspension and a recommendation of expulsion by the principal or the setting up of an alternative education program for the student.

CHAPTER VIII

Programs To Reduce Absentee and Dropout Rates

School districts are using a wide variety of approaches to reduce absentee and dropout rates. Generally, however, administrators say that both excessive absenteeism, particularly truancy, and dropping out are complex problems that defy easy solutions.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals identified these themes that are common to successful attendance programs:

- The attendance policy is strong.
- The attendance policy has been formed by a representative group of administrators, teachers, students and parents.
- The policy is well publicized. All parents and students are repeatedly informed of attendance requirements.
- The policy is consistently enforced throughout the school by all staff members: principal, teachers, counselors and others.
- Follow-up on absences is immediate.

The Denver Public Schools has identified the general characteristics of successful dropout prevention programs. The district, which has established holding power committees at the high school level in an attempt to reduce dropout rates, says dropout programs must be different from those in which the potential dropout has had prior involvement. "Attempts to coax and persuade potential dropouts to stay in school will be unsuccessful if the school offers programs which the pupils previously have failed."

Essentially, a dropout prevention program "should be tailored to fit the pupil needs of a particular school and, within the school, of each participating pupil," the Denver district adds. "A determination should be made of the reasons for pupils dropping out of a particular school. Based on these reasons, a program should then be constructed, implemented, evaluated and modified as necessary." Dropout prevention, the district concludes, must begin at the primary level and continue through the secondary years.

Examples follow of truancy and dropout prevention programs operating at the federal, state and local levels:

NDN

NDN Offers Exemplary Projects

Want help in solving the problems of truant students?

Local school districts can tap a federal progam designed to solve many different kinds of educational problems — including absenteeism. It is the National Diffusion Network (NDN).

The NDN provides a means whereby local districts can learn about exemplary, effective education projects that have been developed with federal funds over the past 14 years. Most of the NDN offerings focus on basic skills for elementary students. They range, however, from early childhood projects that can identify learning disabilities before a child enters school to special education and to the high school, concentrating on remedial skills and on providing help for disaffected students and potential dropouts.

Exemplary projects developed by teachers in a classroom setting are required to prove their effectiveness to a panel of federal evaluation and education experts. Projects "validated" by the federal panel are invited to submit an application to the U.S. Office of Education for dissemination funds as part of the NDN. The funds are used to help other local schools and districts adopt an NDN project.

Local schools can find out about the projects available for adoption and how the adoption process works from an NDN-funded "State Facilitator." This person is most often located in the state education agency. The State Facilitator's job is to help local districts pinpoint specific education problems and to identify the NDN project that addresses these problems. In the case of reading or math problems, for example, many different NDN projects offer possible solutions. The role of the State Facilitator then becomes one of helping the local school or district narrow the choice of project.

The State Facilitator can arrange for local school administrators to see firsthand the NDN project they are interested in, whether the project is located in the same state or across the nation. When an adoption choice is made, the State Facilitator arranges for inservice training of teachers, administrators and others who will be implementing the new project. In addition to inservice training, personnel from the project being adopted provide sample curriculum materials, long-term follow-up, general assistance and additional training, as needed, to the adopting school or district.

Descriptions of two NDN projects specifically designed for use with youth who are excessively absent, disaffected and potential dropouts follow:

Project Focus operates in two 1,600-student high schools in Independent School District #623, Roseville, Minn. This NDN-funded project provides an alternative for approximately 75 students in grades 10-12 in each school. Students enrolled in Focus generally are unable to function in the traditional classroom. They may be underachievers or potential dropouts and may have developed a pattern of behavior problems and absenteeism.

In Focus, students may take a full load of five classes. They also are encouraged to take at least one class in the traditional school program. Students may receive credit for supervised on-the-job training. A state-funded work experience component enables them to meet for one hour each day to discuss topics such as self-development, work problems and job relations.

All Focus students are required to enroll in "Family Group," the heart of the Focus approach. Each group consists of 8 to 10 students and one teacher-advisor who meet together for one class period daily throughout the school year. The idea is to encourage "positive youth development" by using peer pressure within a group structure, Focus administrators explained. They added: "The success of Family Group is not magic. Rather, it involves methods which others can learn and use."

Among the concepts Focus administrators and teachers stress are the following: Alienated students need to know that staff members care about them; teachers must set realistic expectations for students; students must be made to feel secure in the school environment; many different forms of individualization are needed, e.g., curriculum, time structuring, discipline, rewards and problem resolution; students must learn to take responsibility for their own behavior.

The student-teacher ratio is approximately the same as in the regular school program. Additional costs to adopt the program vary from school to school, depending on the district's facilities, materials and personnel.

For more information, contact Sue Schillinger, Project Coordinator, Focus, Human Resources Associates, Inc., 121 East Second St., Hastings, Minn. 55033.

DEEP PROJECT

Project DEEP, developed in the Wichita (Kans.) Public Schools between 1971 and 1974, became part of the NDN in 1977. It stands for Diversified Educational Experiences Program.

Adopted by more than two dozen school districts in 10 states and the District of Columbia, Project DEEP was originally designed for use with apathetic learners, students with discipline problems, poor attendance and potential dropouts. In addition to helping its original target students, it has also worked well for gifted, talented and creative students. It can be used as an alternative within the traditional high school or junior high school.

At the site where it was originally developed, DEEP was credited with reducing the absentee rate by 30 percent and the dropout rate by 37 percent.

How does DEEP work? Simply stated, DEEP gives students a chance to complete a project of their own design in an untraditional setting and receive academic credit for it. School districts have used DEEP as an alternative class in a variety of academic areas — arts, social studies and science.

A DEEP classroom makes extensive use of electronic and non-electronic media: cameras, movie projectors, photographic supplies and equipment, tape recorders and art supplies. Students use the media to complete the project of their choice, which accounts for part of the attractiveness of the course. Before students work on their projects, however, the instructor must prepare them to get along with each other, to develop class goals, to learn to operate equipment and to learn to negotitate a project. Students should be enrolled in a DEEP class for at least one semester to give the instructor time to develop student attitudes and skills.

DEEP requires an open classroom structure and a well trained teacher who is firm and sets boundaries, who can be open and trusting with students, and who can develop in the students a sense of ownership in the class.

DEEP students work in large and small groups. They may go into the community to do research. They are given administrative responsibility for keeping daily attendance and for negotiating and enforcing the rules for classroom behavior.

Under DEEP's classroom management system, no adjustment is needed in class size, said Jane Connett, project director. A regular size class of 20 to 35 students can be accommodated with the model, she said. The only requirement in the project's flexible management model, she advised, is student involvement in setting goals and evaluation of their own and other class members' projects.

Among the positive outcomes of DEEP, in addition to reduced absentee and dropout rates: Improved attitudes shown by increased respect for and value of learning and reduced vandalism and theft.

Connett noted that by improving student attendance, DEEP actually helps districts increase state allocations based on average daily attendance.

For more information, contact Jane Connett, Director, Project DEEP, Educational Services Building, 640 N. Emporia, Wichita, Kans. 67214.

For more information about the NDN or for the name of the State Facilitator (who can provide descriptions of all available NDN projects), contact Seymour Rubak, Division of Educational Replication, U.S. Office of Education, Room 3616, 7th and D Streets, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20201.

Illinois Funds Truant Program

In some states, both state and federal funds are being used to help local school districts provide suitable programs for students who are alienated from school and for those who are excessively absent or truant.

In Illinois, for example, a line item in the state education budget earmarks $500,000 annually to a Truant Alternative Program (TAP). Two of the programs being funded under TAP in fiscal year 1980 are the first program in Illinois to provide services to elementary truants and potential dropouts and the first major attempt in the state to deal with Spanish-speaking truants. Details follow:

Program to serve elementary students: In Lake County, the Learning Community (a privately run alternative program) was awarded a $60,000 grant to serve approximately 35 students in grades 5-7 who are likely truants or potential dropouts. The Learning Community received the contract for the pilot program after it successfully demonstrated a successful approach in other similar alternative centers set up to serve high school students.

The elementary age enrollees are identified by staff members in local schools in Lake County districts. Parental permission is required before a youngster may be placed in the program. The goal is to return the youngster to the regular school at the end of a year's stay.

Students are tested to measure their mastery of the basics, and a diagnosis for each youngster takes the form of an individualized educational plan. The program stresses remedial education in basic skills, taught mainly through the use of teaching machines. Students work at their own speed, but on a contract basis. Competencies are specified, and each one must be certified before a student moves on to a new skill.

The program keeps costs down through a different staffing pattern than is used in traditional schools. One teacher/director has overall responsibility for the program, assisted by aides, clerks, volunteers and interns from local universities and colleges.

Another TAP program, the Kane County Truancy Program, is being extended to serve Spanish-speaking truants in 1979-80. It is operated by an educational service region serving 73,000 public school children and 10,000 private and parochial students.

The Kane County program was started because of a fourfold increase in the truancy rate in its area between 1968 and the mid 1970s. The number of dropouts from the county schools has almost tripled — from 683 in 1967-68 to 1,830 three years later. Statistics collected by the truancy program show a direct relaltionship between truancy and dropping out. In comparing the records of 240 Kane County truants in 1977, county educators found that only seven of the group, or 2.9 percent, finished high school.

The truancy program works like this: Local schools are requested to use all available resources at the school level to handle truant students before making a referral to the program. When they cannot improve a student's attendance, they are advised to contact the truancy program to request the services of a youth outreach worker. The program's records show that principals typically ask for the help of one of the outreach workers when a youngster has a 30 percent absentee rate.

The outreach workers make the first contact with a truant usually within 24 hours of receiving a request. After that initial contact, they also talk with the building administrator and the teachers of the truant student. A second visit with the youngster follows. A plan to improve attendance is set up. The outreach worker monitors the student's attendance and contacts him periodically to reinforce a positive attendance pattern.

If the student continues to be truant, an official court truancy notice is filed, the parents are notified and a hearing is conducted. If no improvement results, the case is presented to the circuit court.

How successful is the program? In 1976-77, a total of 610 cases were handled by the outreach workers. Only 74 cases were referred to the circuit court. In the following year, 69 court referrals were made out of 741 cases. For the first eight months of the 1978-79 school year, 636 requests for assistance were answered; 54 cases ended up in court. In other words, the program resolved most of the truancy cases without resorting to legal action. Attendance has held steady in the schools served by the program, while it has slipped downward, on the average, in other schools around the state. A questionnaire mailed in April 1978 to all building principals found that 85 percent believed the program had helped attendance "considerably."

The program entered a new phase with expansion of services to Spanish surnamed youngsters, many of whom come from non-English speaking families. Spanish surnamed youth in one city served by the program represent 10 percent of the school population, but 22 percent of truancy referrals. The program could not find funds to hire a Spanish speaking outreach worker until the Illinois Office of Education agreed to fund the new position in 1979-80.

The budget for the program is approximately $55,000. That pays the salary and fringe benefits of three outreach workers and an attendance secretary and mileage allowances for travel between schools. The cost per student served, according to the program's records, was $30 in the

first year (based on 610 cases), $27 in the second year (741 cases) and an estimated $36 in the third year.

For more information about TAP, contact Tom Grayson, Illinois Office of Education, 100 N. First St., Springfield Ill. 62777.

RAP

New York Provides Consultants

The New York State Education Department is taking a more general approach in helping local schools. It initiated the Resource Allocation Plan or RAP in late 1978. The purpose: to give direct assistance to selected schools or districts by having 20 members of the department staff spend time working directly and solely with a specific school or district.

RAP started when education officials became concerned about the possible effects of statewide minimum competency tests. One fear was that an excessive number of students would not pass the tests, thus increasing dropout rates.

State education officials visited 200 schools to interview staff and sort out problems and constraints. The schools were notified they could request the direct assistance of a RAP consultant from the state agency.

The consultants were chosen by a steering committee representing 14 divisions in the state agency. Most of them have teaching experience and are currently working in the general education/curriculum services unit of the agency. Thirty consultants were trained; 20 are assigned to work with a specific school or district. Under the plan, each consultant will spend 50 percent of his or her time working exclusively with staff members in the assigned school or district for a period as short as six months or as long as three to five years.

"Our intent," said Dorothy Foley, supervisor of the RAP office, "is to help the local school or district define problems and coordinate resources." RAP representatives are supposed to identify funding sources and other services provided by the state agency that could be tapped by the school or district. As one example, the state earmarked $2.8 million in federal funds under Title IV-C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The 200 schools and districts initially involved in RAP were given first priority to participate.

Already, said Foley, some of the districts have asked specifically for inservice training in the teaching of reading and writing. The RAP representatives also have identified a need in some of the schools and districts for more articulation between grade levels.

"We hope to raise student performance and to help local units better coordinate their services," said Foley. "We may find in some districts that the real problem is that students just are not coming to school," she added.

For more information about RAP, contact Dorothy Foley at the New York State Education Department, Room 870, Education Building Annex, Albany, N.Y. 12234.

Oakland: Frank Admission of Problem

The Oakland (Calif.) Public School District kicked off its anti-truancy campaign by admitting it lost $3.2 million during the 1977-78 school year because of unexcused absences.

In the first year of the anti-truancy campaign, attendance improved 24 percent. Unexcused absences were down from approximately 28,000 in February 1978 to 21,000 in February 1979. The 24 percent reduction represented a 15 percent truancy reduction in elementary school attendance rates, a 37 percent reduction in middle schools, a 27 percent reduction in junior high schools and a 27 percent reduction in senior high schools.

The district's campaign included no extraordinary methods, just daily attendance taking in each class, personal contact with parents of truants and other students who are absent without valid excuses, the development of an attendance plan by all schools and the maintenance of accurate records of absences.

Parents are contacted when a student has more than one unexcused absence. A total of 25 full-time employees were added to the district staff (attendance workers and clerks). Nevertheless, the district attributes its success in raising attendance levels to its strategy of calling attention to the problem and of gaining the cooperation of parents and student body leaders.

Chicago: Start with Thyself

The school has more control over itself than it does over student, family and community; therefore, it must begin to work within its own confines to get a positive program started. That rational for a school attendance improvement program was offered to the Chicago Board of Education in April 1978 by an attendance improvement committee.

The committee cited the following as key ingredients of an attendance improvement plan:

- All positive activities in both school and community must be brought together to improve attendance.
- The key to the success of an attendance program is the local school. Each school should start with a "firm, fair and well publicized attendance policy."
- An effective reporting procedure to keep the home informed must be implemented.
- An alternate curriculum for chronic absentees is needed.
- The teacher of an absent child should be the first person to contact the parents.
- Schools with more than one telephone line should reserve one line for incoming calls between certain hours to allow parents to report absences.
- Truant officers should not make the initial phone contact with parents, nor should they be used as a substitute for initial phone contact with the parents.
- At the high school level, teachers should make calls during their "personnel periods," which were created with this activity in mind.

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Baltimore Offers 19 Suggestions

The attendance policy of the Baltimore City Public Schools makes clear that the success of the attendance program depends on the efforts of local schools. The district offers them 19 specific suggestions to improve attendance:

1. Establish a faculty committee on attendance and instruction.
2. Develop a system or plan for recognition, contests, awards, citations.
3. Involve parents (after training) in activities such as volunteer clerical services and home telephoning.
4. Form a student committee.
5. Organize a buddy system.
6. Organize student tutoring.
7. Put attendance information in newsletters, letters and bulletins to parents.
8. Develop class, grade and school projects.
9. Develop "support and assistance" services for parents who seem to need help.
10. Put attendance on the PTA agenda.
11. Make attendance and achievement a priority.
12. Conduct a poster contest.
13. Conduct orientation programs for new students and parents.
14. Make effective use of local school screening committees.
15. Devote time in faculty meetings to student attendance matters.
16. Organize high-interest homeroom programs.
17. Release attendance figures by subject and class.
18. Establish clear and definite procedures for the withdrawal of over-age students.
19. Organize peer counseling services.

Richmond Suggests Alternatives

What can a large school district do to promote attendance? Administrators at the Richmond (Va.) Public Schools suggested to building principals that "procedures should be devised to clearly demonstrate a commitment of care and concern for student success and the importance that regular attendance plays in this effort."

District officials suggested that "care and concern" could be shown through the use of scheduling procedures that match teaching-learning styles, course content that interests and motivates students through a sense of achievement, involvement of students in curricular and co-curricular activities that helps them feel a sense of belonging, and alternatives to traditional courses and teaching methods.

In addition, the district lists numerous alternatives to promote school attendance. It recommends that each school provide at least three alternative programs for students who have chronic unexcused absences.

The district's suggestions:

- Student participation in goal-setting for the school and students at the beginning of the year and periodically after that.
- A group activity or trip at the beginning of the year rather than at the end.
- Individual, 10-minute conferences between teachers and students at the beginning of the year.
- Providing a method for student concerns to receive immediate attention, e.g., through peer counseling.
- A way to combat depersonalization at the secondary level, e.g., through an exchange of individual letters between teachers and students.
- Investigation of the reasons marginally successful students stay in school; application of the findings to potential dropouts.
- Inclusion of students who often go unrecognized in peer counseling and peer tutoring programs.
- An "adopt an absentee" project. One suggestion for starting such a program is to compile a list of chronic absentees. Then encourage each school employee, from the principal to the cafeteria worker, to adopt an absentee by showing special concern for the student, saying hello, inquiring about the student following an absence.
- Providing a neighborhood study center to promote studying for students who cannot study in the home.
- Encouraging the use of volunteers at both the elementary and secondary levels.
- Holding workshops on absenteeism for parents.
- Starting an attendance competition between classes.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Strategy: Start with Kindergartners

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg (N.C.) School District announced a campaign at the beginning of the 1978-79 school year to reduce absenteeism by 25 percent. It recommended that each school follow six attendance procedures:

1. One person in each school should be designated by the principal as an attendance contact person. At the elementary level, this person will receive and record phone messages regarding attendance. At the secondary level, the contact person — usually a counselor — will also coordinate attendance data and provide additional background information on the student.
2. Each school should develop an attendance committee to formulate methods of dealing with attendance problems. The committee could include the principal, teachers, students, parents, counselors, school social workers and attendance workers, and PTA and community representatives.

3. At the beginning of the school year, principals should send a letter to all parents whose children were absent 15 days or more during the previous school year.
4. A special letter should be sent to parents of kindergarten students who are absent from school.
5. Parents of students who are chronically absent due to illness should be sent a letter from the principal requesting a doctor's statement verifying the illness.
6. All schools should adopt the same attendance referral procedure. The procedure recommended by the district calls for teachers to ascertain the reason for absence; the school nurse to intervene in cases of chronic illness; contact with the parents when a student has been absent for three consecutive days; and recording of contacts with parents by teachers, principal and social workers.

Dear Parent: You Make the Difference

School districts try various ways to gain the support of parents to improve attendance. Some threaten. Some cajole. Others use rational arguments and cite statistics. Here are some examples:

Cite parental neglect. A Pennsylvania district notes in its parent handbook that unexcused absence is usually due to parental neglect, illegal employment or truancy. It adds: "Such reasons as 'visiting,' 'away from home,' 'had to go to the store,' or 'overslept' are clearly due to parents not fully sensing their responsibility."

Cite employers' expectations. The Monticello (Idaho) High School explains in its attendance policy that it is taking the position of business and industry. "The school expects students to care for personal matters such as haircuts, shopping, beauty salon and photography appointments outside of school hours."

Cite statistics. John D. Casey, principal of Pacific High School, San Leandro, Calif., appealed to parents in a letter that accompanied a new attendance policy. He explained that the school's absentee rate was approximately 9 percent daily, with up to a 30 percent absentee rate in some classes. He also reported that while only 5 percent of the students had exceptional health problems, 20 percent of the absent students were regularly absent for reasons of illness. Further, he noted, "normal absenteeism should not exceed 4 percent." Casey's conclusion: "Only a small percentage of the school's absence is due to cutting. Most of the absences have been excused by parents."

Casey made these suggestions to parents: "If your student does not have an exceptional health problem, we encourage you to discuss with your family physician why your student is absent so often . . . or to schedule a meeting with your child's counselor."

Programs for Pregnant Teen-Agers and Young Mothers

A new federal program has been established to encourage community agencies, including schools, to work together on programs for pregnant teen-agers and young mothers. The program, officially a part of HEW's Public Health Service, is administered by the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs.

The office can provide information on effective programs to serve pregnant teen-agers and young mothers. In Congressional testimony, Lulu Mae Nix, the director of the program, cited these models:

- **Delaware Adolescent Program, Inc.: A 10-year-old program providing medical care, continuing education, social services and child care to young mothers in all Delaware counties.**
- **Center for School-Age Mothers and Their Infants, Johns Hopkins Medical Center, Baltimore: A program which has successfully reduced the number of young mothers who drop out of school and the rate of repeat pregnancies. It offers pre- and post-natal care, primary health care and parenting education.**
- **New Futures School, Albuquerque, N. Mex.: A program which has been effective in returning 70 percent of young mothers to school.**

In addition to providing information, the new office may also be a source of funds for school districts interested in serving as an "anchor" for an adolescent pregnancy program. Grants will be made available to public agencies, including schools and private organizations, to coordinate comprehensive community services for young parents and pregnant adolescents.

For more information, contact Lulu Mae Nix, Director, Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs, Room 725-H, Humphrey Building, 200 Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20201.

Dear Parent: Skipping Can't Be Taken Lightly

One way the small Chateaugay (N.Y.) School District tries to combat skipping or truancy is by sending the following letter to parents of truant children:

Dear Parent:

"Skipping" school may be a thrill for young people but it causes many unnecessary problems for the student, parents, and school personnel and thus cannot be taken lightly. Consider these points:

1. It is against the law. "Truancy" is a violation of Section 887 of the "Code of Criminal Procedure" which classifies a truant as a "vagrant" within the meaning of criminal law. Truancy must be recorded on school records and is reportable to Family Court which can involve a hearing to determine if the child is to be declared "a child in need of supervision", placed on probation or possibly assigned to a state school of correction.

2. Poor attendance usually results in lower grades.

3. Some courses have minimum requirements for attendance. When these minimums are not met, credit cannot be granted.

4. Of great concern also is the student's safety. When a student has skipped school it is often the case that the parents assume their child is in school under proper supervision and the school assumes the student is legitimately absent and at home. Who is responsible for the student's safety under these circumstances? Skipping school often results in students riding around in their own or someone else's car with all the proven hazards associated with this activity.

In any event, we must realize that irregular attendance without justification is a serious matter.

We ask your cooperation by discussing this with your child, by providing proper excuses for legal absences, and by supporting our efforts to insure that each student gains as much as possible from his or her educational program. When someone from school calls your home to check on your child's attendance it is not done to make an accusation. It is an expression of our concern for our legal responsibilities and for your child's safety and education program.

If this problem increases, we will have no choice but to suspend students from school pending a meeting of the parents with the District Principal and possibly with the Board of Education before the student returns to school.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Rowe
District Principal

Patrick Calnon
Pupil Services

The PTA Can Help

Local PTA volunteers can help cure school attendance ills. That was the finding of an ambitious national project undertaken by the National Congress of Parents and Teachers in 1974. At that time, five states were involved in the attendance improvement project, funded by the Sears Foundation. Now, the national PTA is trying to organize a coalition of agencies, parents, the general public and the schools to reverse rising rates of absenteeism, dropouts, vandalism, suspensions and discipline problems.

What can local PTA volunteers do? "We are advising members to tackle the local attendance problem by finding out the size and causes for the absentee rate, what the school is doing to correct problems and what parents can do," said national PTA President Virginia Sparling in an interview for this report.

The National PTA has identified the following tasks as appropriate for PTA volunteers:

- Keeping daily records for schools on the number of incidents and reasons for absences.
- Telephoning parents of absent students on a daily basis.
- Volunteering to work in the schools with students who are having learning problems.
- Working with school boards to develop and disseminate information on attendance policies.
- Helping schools make the public and parents aware of the negative effects of poor attendance.
- Sponsoring workshops for people directly involved in the prevention of attendance problems, including parents.
- Preparing and mailing a monthly newsletter to parents to improve communications between the home and school.
- Greeting and informing new families about school policies and programs and about community support services.

"The battle to reduce absenteeism can only be won in the local community," Sparling said. "Everybody must be involved — teachers, adminstrators, school nurses, business people, social service agencies, police, judges and parents." The issue of attendance "really demands the attention of the PTA," she added, "because it is the parent who can effect solutions to the problem.

"We need to create a network in the community which is supportive of the school and of the student and his need for a quality education," the PTA president said. "It is a battle that must be won."

What an Attendance Teacher Can Do

Attendance teacher Jack Janin of the Glen Cove (N.Y.) School District considers chronic absenteeism and truancy a "symptom of maladjustment stemming from the home, the community and the school." The way to deal with both problems, he believes, is on a casework and counseling basis. Janin outlined what that means in a five-page analysis of an effective secondary attendance program.

Janin's analysis mainly concerns the role of an attendance teacher in a secondary program. It is particularly appropri-

No Absences; No Tests

Good Attendance Rewarded

Is perfect attendance an award in itself or should districts try to encourage it through incentive programs?

Judging by the returns to the *Critical Issues Survey*, some districts believe a little encouragement helps.

A popular reward is exemption from exams. The School Board of District 9-R, Durango, Colo., for example, notes in its attendance policy that students who are in attendance the entire semester without an absence may be exempt, upon teacher approval, from taking semester final examinations.

In Mt. Olive, Ill., the board of education excuses students from taking semester examinations on the basis of attendance and grade average. Exemptions are in effect for students who have an A average and no more than three days' absence, a B average and no more than two days' absence and a C average with no more than one day absent. All absences count in determining who's eligible, the board ruled.

The Dillon, Mont., schools set up an attendance incentive program which benefits students who have a passing grade for the quarter and only one absence. By completing all other requirements, the students are exempt from a final quarter exam, a term paper or some other type of project — whatever the teacher requires of students who do not qualify for the incentive program.

High school students in Fowler, Colo., can receive a free activity pass, providing they have not missed more than a total of six class periods throughout the school year. The pass is valid for the following school year.

Not every district approves of incentive programs. The attendance policy of the Cameron (Tex.) Public Schools had this to say: "Absence and tardiness should be held to a minimum, but no pupil should attend school when his health or that of others might be jeopardized. Therefore, there are to be no awards for perfect attendance in the Cameron Public Schools."

ate for attendance teachers in New York State because of the references to that state's compulsory attendance laws and regulations.

Many of the recommendations, however, are general rather than specific in nature:

1. Consider class cutting as truancy.
2. Schedule home visits if the student has been absent two days, and if there has been no contact from the home.
3. Schedule home visits in cases of chronic absenteeism and if suspicious calls (e.g., alleging illness) are received from the home.
4. Determine which students are developing patterns of absenteeism, particularly by repeatedly taking off Mondays and Fridays.
5. Interview and counsel students as soon as possible after an absence.
6. Develop a file on each student.
7. Counsel on a daily basis, if possible, students who are developing a pattern of attendance problems.
8. Leave notes at the home if parents are out when the attendance teacher calls. Ask them to call the school the following day. If they do not comply, ask them to come to the school for a discussion of the student's absenteeism.
9. When absences become chronic, request verification from a doctor. If it is not received, remind the parents that absences are illegal.
10. If unlawful absences continue, and the student is under age 16, consider referral to family court.
11. If suspension or expulsion of the student is contemplated, explore alternative methods of education. Inform parents of options.
12. Refer chronic absentees for psychological services. Provide attendance records to psychologist. Schedule a conference of the psychologist, school guidance counselor and school administrator. Follow up with the psychologist to set up rehabilitation procedures.
13. If the student's case must be referred on a formal basis to the courts, provide the court with a case history, including grades and test results. Students should be referred to the court only after all school resources have been exhausted and counseling has failed to remedy the problem.
14. The attendance teacher should attend any court hearings even though the law may not require such attendance. This indicates the school's continuing interest in the student and his family. It also provides for continuity in follow-up.
15. If the court places the student on parole in the parents' custody, the attendance teacher should continue to work with the family and report any further cuts and absences immediately, both verbally and in writing, to the assigned probation officer.
16. The attendance teacher should never be used as a threat with students. Instead he should be provided an opportunity to work with the student from the onset of attendance problems and to be continually involved. "Too often, other personnel work with the student and when they fail, they report the problem to the attendance teacher for reference to the court." Janin said an attendance teacher "needs the opportunity to build a relationship with both student and family."
17. Remind parents that extended vacations, causing long absences of students, are unlawful, unless the student is registered in a school where he is on vacation. The attendance teacher should inform the parent of the requirement to place the child in an out-of-town school. Parents should be asked to forward the name and address of the school. If they fail to follow the request, the attendance teacher should notify them in writing of the unlawful nature of the student's absence.

Daily Reports Cut Absentee Rate

Early and continuing attention to attendance problems accounts for the success of James Tyler in cutting the absentee rate at his 450-pupil high school to 5.5 percent. Tyler, principal of Seneca Senior High School in Ovid, N.Y., uses two approaches to "stay on top" of attendance problems. He initiated the use of a daily conduct report form and a broadcast over the school's intercom system of the names of students reported missing from each class.

Tyler works with students as soon as he sees an attendance problem developing. For example, when a student accumulates several tardies to class, skips or unexcused absences, he discusses the problem with the student and hands him a 5 × 7 inch "Student Daily Conduct and Attendance Report." The form is printed on paper that automatically makes a second copy. At the end of the day, one copy goes to teachers, the second goes into the student's file.

The student must ask each teacher to sign the form and grade behavior on a daily basis for a contracted period of time. Teachers have three conduct grade options: E for excellent, S for satisfactory and P for poor.

The daily report form has a positive effect on students and, often, on the teachers as well, noted Tyler. "It gives attention to the student who doesn't get much attention, the one who will do things like arriving late or misbehaving just to get a chance to talk with the teacher," Tyler explained. Teachers, on the other hand, start noticing and praising improved behavior, the principal said. "The system gives the teacher and the student a chance to develop rapport."

Tyler used the daily report form with equally good results in an 1,800-pupil high school where he formerly served as assistant principal. "We had tremendous success with it there," he said, because it helped the school staff make sure no student problems were overlooked. Progress in correcting problems was tracked daily through the report forms. Another advantage of using the system in the larger school was the daily contact between the assistant principals and counselors and the 60 to 70 students who had to turn in report forms.

Tyler stressed the importance of using the daily reports with students who are tardy. The student who is often late becomes the student who is often absent, he said. In other words, the correction of a tardiness problem in the early stages may prevent the student from becoming a frequent absentee.

An Answer from the Ford Foundation

How Can Educators Improve the Learning Environment?

What's important in dealing with youth who are alienated, who cause problems, who do not fit the mainstream culture? How can administrators improve the learning environment so that all youth want to come to school?

Exceptional Teaching for Exceptional Learning provides some answers to those kinds of questions. The booklet, sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies, explains what research and practical experiences have revealed about the learning of handicapped children over a 15-year period. "Unlike the common schools which have had to provide education en masse, the field of special education has been able to find out what works best with individual learners," the booklet says. It explains how research findings can be applied to regular schools.

First, the booklet explores the four main concepts in the field of special education:

- Teachers and other educators must understand how children grow and develop, both physically and psychologically.
- The daily teaching program must be geared to individual differences in children. Some children, for example, are visual learners; some learn best by listening; some require a combination of techniques.
- Teachers must learn to be specific about objectives, means and outcomes. "Specificity of method and outcome require careful definitions of desired and undesired behaviors as well as careful documentation of those interventions which lead to positive behavior changes and those which lead to negative ones."
- The teacher must be aware of the child's total universe, i.e., everything that shapes the child's learning, including physical surroundings at home and at school; family, peer, neighborhood, community and church contacts; TV, radio, magazines, newspapers and other media.

The booklet goes beyond the four concepts by detailing a set of specific instructional themes which, it says, can be modified and refined to benefit all learners. Some of the main themes follow:

1. **Trust:** Schools must recognize that trust is essential; subsequently, they must be willing to invest the time, thought and talent to bring it about. Individual teachers can build trust, the booklet says, by taking time simply to be with a child; to recognize simply and openly a child's feelings; to modulate expectations of a child's achievement until success, however modest, becomes frequent; to be patient; to be utterly dependable.
2. **Expectancy:** Many schools and teachers fail because they expect so little of a child, the booklet says. It adds that changes in expectancy have changed the character of institutions serving the handicapped and have profoundly altered the lives of the people involved.
3. **Time:** Many children, in addition to handicapped children, need extra time to do things. Special educators have learned that children often get into serious difficulties at the low points in their lives when many things go against them. In such circumstances, the booklet notes, time can be claimed as an ally in helping the child. It also advises: "What is sometimes required is restraint, to *not* do something that would simply add to the child's misfortune."
4. **Competence:** Special educators have learned that the best starting point for effective instruction is to build on the strengths of a child and then to repair weakness in the context of successful learning. Another lesson from special educators: In helping a child achieve competence in some academic skill, it is often necessary at the outset to avoid traditional school-like activities.
5. **Individualization of instruction:** The booklet strongly advocates the practice of grouping children according to subject interests and vocational aspirations and using variety in the structure and intensity of instruction based on the student's needs. Another recommendation: the use of "prescriptive" or diagnostic teaching, i.e., continual use of assessment and instruction.
6. **Reward and punishment:** The report discusses the pluses and minuses of behavior modification techniques. It notes, for example, that the climate of a rowdy junior high school was changed when teachers were told to use praise 80 percent of the time and reproof 20 percent.
7. **Models and modeling:** The teacher is the crucial model for most students. The recalcitrant learner who does not have trustworthy adults available to him will seek discovery and learning from peers and older children.
8. **Parents:** No source of assistance to schools is so promising as the use of parents in regular school programs. For older students, peers often can be used much as parents in facilitating learning.
9. **Support systems:** Teachers need four kinds of support systems to do their jobs effectively: personnel training, staff development, research and development, and technical assistance and communication
10. **Health education:** All schools need to become more aware of the need for adequate nutritional programs and for providing an outlet for the physical energy of youth.

Exceptional Teaching for Exceptional Learning is available from the Ford Foundation, P.O. Box 559, Naugatuck, Conn. 06770; 1979; $3.95.

Tyler cited one use of the system in legal proceedings. The teacher-signed conduct reports were accepted by the courts as documentation of "a child in need of supervision," said the New York principal.

Firm Detention Policy Works

Parent support and consistent enforcement of strict regulations cut the absentee rate for junior and senior high school students in the Valley Center (Kans.) School District from an average of 12 to 15 percent in 1975 to an average of 4.5 percent three years later.

The turnaround came with the hiring of a new superintendent, James M. Jerome. He said the absentee problem was "universal" and a "regretable fact of life" among suburban districts in the area when he accepted the superintendency of the 1,700-student district. "I just couldn't believe it had to be that way," Jerome said. "So I sold the board on a strict policy and regulations. Next, we worked on support."

The new regulations were publicized before they were implemented through parent meetings and letters, newspapers, handbills, student handbooks and the student newspaper.

Jerome insists on consistency. "A parent has a hard time getting the kids to class without consistent support from everyone down the line," he said.

In working with staff members, Jerome asked for their support and promised his. He convinced them that regular attendance and consistent enforcement are critical. At the same time, he assured them of the support of administrators and parents.

The program started with the hiring of an attendance clerk and a certificated teacher to supervise a detention class at the end of the school day. Teachers were required to take roll in every class and to report absences promptly. Parents were requested to call before school started if their child was home ill. The attendance clerk called the home of any child who was reported absent for any class period if the child's parent had not phoned in.

"Consistency is important," Jerome stressed. "We let the parents know that we are looking after their kids. We want them to know we care if a student misses one class."

Make-up work is required for every missed class, whether the absence is excused or unexcused. Upon returning to school, the student obtains a make-up slip from the office. It must be returned, filled out, at the end of the day. Each of the student's teachers must sign the slip and list the required make-up work.

Students with an unexcused absence must also make up class time, hour for hour, in a detention class at the end of the regular school day. "Detention is very rigid," the superintendent said. "The students must study when they are there. They can't sleep. And there is no grace period for arriving late." Students lose one-half hour credit for detention for every minute they are late.

Students who receive three-day suspensions must make up missed work and a total of 18 hours of detention. An accumulation of six unexcused absences in a quarter or of 10 in a semester results in the loss of credit for the course.

Due process steps prior to loss of credit include a student conference, a conference with the student and his parents and written reminders of attendance problems and district regulations. Students between the ages of 7 and 16 may appeal the loss of credit to a hearing committee. The committee can recommend the granting of full credit or half credit for a course if the student can prove that extenuating circumstances accounted for the attendance problems.

Parents support the attendance program 100 percent, Jerome said. He also cited other positive effects of the program: Teacher morale is up. The dropout rate has decreased by 50 percent. There have been no appeals beyond the administrative level.

The key to success, Jerome insisted, "is being fair, firm and consistent."

Matching Learning to Teaching

The Susquehanna Valley School District in Conklin, N.Y., is experimenting with a project that could lead to better identification of dropout-prone students and to substantial reductions in dropout statistics. Use of the project in the district's three-year high school resulted in a reduction in a sample of potential dropouts from 21 percent in 1976-77 to 9 percent in 1978-79.

The project, known as LIST (Learning Interest Style Testing), began in 1976 with federal funding provided under Title IV-C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The passage of new state legislation prompted the district to try LIST. The legislation requires districts to provide an individualized educational program for all students who fail to pass minimum competency tests. Before that can happen, however, districts must determine how individual students learn best. That's what LIST tries to do.

The project does not advocate the use of new materials. It concentrates, instead, on finding out what is the most successful learning style for each student. In other words, it tries to match student learning styles with the most appropriate teaching style and materials.

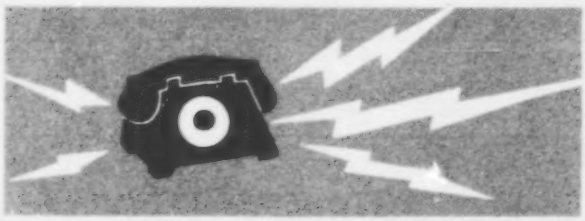
Jim Williams, Susquehanna's learning style specialist, explained how the individual learning style is determined: All students in the three-year high school complete a 45-minute "learning interest survey" at the beginning of the school year. With a teacher's help, students work on developing an individual "prescription map" during the first two months of school. In addition, each student is asked in

another survey to name his most successful learning styles, e.g., reading, listening to lectures, discovery, using audiovisual materials, working alone or in groups. This survey, said Williams, helps school staff validate the student's "prescription map."

The potential dropouts can be identified, said Williams, because they are the ones who fail to take the "map" survey seriously and who inaccurately identify their best learning styles. These students also have poor attendance records. They read below grade level, and they are judged by teachers to be poor performers in school.

"Cognitive mapping," the term Williams uses to describe the system, is a means of getting to know the student quickly. It helps teachers and students learn to communicate and to determine if they have similar goals. It also helps them to cooperatively develop a prescription for mastering subject matter in a more successful fashion, he noted. "What it really boils down to is communicating, problem solving and relating. It puts conflicts on less threatening grounds."

The tough job is applying the results of cognitive mapping so the students' most effective learning style matches the teacher's presentation and materials, Williams said. "We've become quite accurate in identifying those who may drop out." But, he added, "we are not yet as effective in preventing it." Williams suggested one answer: Start identifying dropout-prone youngsters earlier than the 10th grade.



Wake-Up Service

"Good morning. It's time to wake up and get ready for school."

That message is delivered to many students across the country by morning wake-up services, often provided by parents and volunteers in an effort to help their local school curb tardiness and absenteeism by chronically tardy students.

At the Wright Intermediate School, Norwalk, Calif., PTA volunteers make the morning wake up calls in what the school terms a successful approach.

At the 475-student Hermantown (Minn.) High School, personalized wake-up service is provided by Principal Ray L. Wero. At 6 a.m. he telephones students who make a habit of arriving late to school. Or, he tells the students to call him at 6 a.m. If they don't, he calls them. And if that doesn't work, he calls them a little earlier the next time. "It works," he says.

In Thule, Greenland, where round-the-clock winter darkness aggravates the problem of getting students to school on time, the school board disconnected the district's morning phone wake-up service. Now, alarm clocks are issued to all pupils.

Tying Grades to Attendance

About 4.6 percent of the 1,014 students at Monroe (Wis.) High School were absent on an average day last year — half the number of three years ago.

The key to the district's success in lowering absenteeism is a "caring staff" and a program that rewards students for good attendance, penalizes them for truancy and avoids penalizing students for absences beyond their control, according to Supt. Burnell Smith.

Quarter grades are raised or lowered a step (e.g., C+ to B−) according to student attendance records. The district's policy outlines this schedule for raising or lowering grades:

Days Absent	*Effect on Grades*
0-1	Raise one step*
2-3	No effect
4-5	Lower one step
6-7	Lower two steps
8-9	Lower three steps
10-11	Lower four steps
Etc.	

* *Each letter grade includes three steps, using plus and minus characters. The C grade, for example, would have these steps:* C+, C and C−

The policy notes that medical emergencies for illness or hospitalization covered by a doctor's certification are exempt. Pre-excused absences, approved by parents and teachers, are counted on a three-to-one ratio. In other words, three days of pre-excused absence count as one day for purposes of determining the effect on a student's grade. Pre-excused absences are allowed for reasons such as deaths in the immediate family, emergency medical or dental appointments, family trips, job interviews and driver exams. Absences for "minor" illness are counted on a three-to-one basis.

District policy specifies that the following are not excusable absences: truancy, suspension, missing the school bus, car trouble, trips not approved in advance, shopping, oversleeping, gainful employment, hair appointments and errands.

Tardiness to school in the morning or after lunch is counted on a two-to-one ratio, i.e., two tardies count as one absence for the purpose of determining effect on grades.

Instructors are required to notify parents by letter when a student has accumulated three absences and again when the student has accumulated seven absences.

Smith defined the policy as one that gives "a little reward for good attendance and a tap on the shoulder for poor attendance." He added: "My concern was that the reward was so small that the students would ignore it."

Students like the program, Smith said, because they get recognition for doing something right. Also tied to the attendance program is a "responsibility grade," which de-

termines whether a student receives a responsibility pass. To qualify, students need a passing grade, good behavior and good attendance. The pass allows 9th and 10th graders to pass freely through the school in their study time, e.g., to the library, to a conference with a teacher. Juniors and seniors may also use the pass to leave campus during their lunch periods.

Smith noted that some boards of education have abandoned attendance programs which tie grades to attendance because of criticism or fear of legal ramifications. He said he and the district's attorney carefully considered the legality of the policy before implementing it. The policy has not been challenged in court, and Smith said that parents, students and staff are highly supportive of it. He outlined other reasons which, he believes, would cause the policy to withstand a court challenge:

- The policy was established by representatives of students, parents, teachers, administrators and board members.
- The effectiveness of the policy is monitored quarterly. If attendance falls, administrators try to determine if modifications are needed.
- The intention of the policy is to reward and encourage good attendance, not to penalize students for being absent.
- The policy includes an appeal process. In effect, it provides a mechanism for taking into account any situations beyond the control of the student.

A key for avoiding court challenges of an attendance policy, the Wisconsin superintendent noted, is to provide due process and not to penalize students for anything beyond their control. Another key, he said, is documentation that the attendance policy encourages student attendance. At Monroe, quarterly reports are prepared to show the effect of the grading policy and the rate of absenteeism. Smith said the records show improved attendance and achievement for both good and poor students since the policy was first implemented in the fall of 1974.

"The staff must care whether students are in school," the superintendent stated. The program cannot be made to work from the central office, he added. "If the staff members don't support it, there's nothing you can do. You can't just adopt a policy and expect it to work. It requires a higher level of caring by the staff."

APPENDIX

Tabulation of Critical Issues Survey

Responses to the AASA Critical Issues Survey were tabulated on the basis of region and district size.

The regional divisions used by the National Assessment of Educational Progress were followed:

Northeast: Conn.; Del.; District of Columbia; Me.; Md.; Mass.; N.H.; N.J.; N.Y.; Pa.; R.I.; Vt.

Southeast: Ala.; Ark.; Fla.; Ga.; Ky.; La.; Miss.; N.C.; S.C.; Tenn.; Va.; W. Va.

Central: Ill.; Ind.; Iowa; Kans.; Mich.; Minn.; Mo.; Nebr.; N. Dak.; Ohio; S. Dak.; Wis.

West: Alaska; Ariz.; Calif.; Colo.; Hawaii; Idaho; Mont.; Nev.; N.Mex.; Okla.; Ore.; Tex.; Utah; Wash.; Wyo.

Percentage Distribution By Region and District Size

DISTRICT SIZE	TOTAL	N.E.	S.E.	CENTRAL	WEST
Under 5,000 students	65.4%	16.5%	7.8%	30.4%	10.7%
5,001 to 10,000	13.9	4.3	2.3	4.9	2.5
10,001 to 25,000	8.8	1.9	1.3	2.5	3.2
Over 25,000	5.7	.4	2.3	1.5	1.5
District size unreported	6.2	1.4	.8	2.5	1.4
Total	100.0%	24.5	14.5	41.7	19.3

Distribution by Region and District Size

DISTRICT SIZE	N.E.	S.E.	CENTRAL	WEST	TOTAL
Under 5,000 students	233	110	429	152	924
5,001 to 10,000	61	32	69	35	197
10,001 to 25,000	27	18	35	45	125
Over 25,000	6	33	21	21	81
District size unreported	20	11	36	20	87
Total	347	204	590	273	1,414

Other AASA Critical Issues Reports

Staff Dismissal: Problems and Solutions. Who says teachers and other school employees can't be fired? They can. School districts can dismiss teachers and other staff members in cases of incompetency or when declining enrollment or budget problems demand cuts. This report examines these kinds of questions, which were submitted by more than 1,700 AASA members in an AASA Critical Issues Survey: What can be done about incompetence; What are the steps in building a dismissal case; What can be learned from districts that have successfully dismissed staff; What about teacher tenure; Alternatives to RIFfing; Due process requirements. One of 10 "must reading" books selected by the National School Boards Association from among 2,500 new education titles in 1978. (80pp; 1978; Stock No. 021-00512)

The Competency Movement: Problems and Solutions. This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the reasons underlying the minimum competency movement. It answers the questions of more than 1,500 AASA members who responded to a Critical Issues Survey. It includes: Reasons behind the competency movement; Considerations in adopting a policy on minimum competency; What kinds of tests can be used; The pros and cons of issuing a single diploma or certificate and available alternatives; Case studies of how various districts and states are implementing competency requirements. A national clearinghouse on minimum competency testing called it "perhaps the best single source of information on competency testing." (92pp; 1978; Stock No. 021-00510)

School Energy Crisis: Problems and Solutions. Schools don't have to sit immobilized while they're clobbered by higher and higher energy costs. This report provides answers to the concerns expressed by more than 3,400 AASA members who replied to an AASA Critical Issues Survey. Topics covered include the following: The energy crisis — impact on the nation; The energy crisis — impact on the nation's schools; Energy audits, the basis for savings; How to hire energy consultants; Advice on energy saving construction; Reducing transportation costs; Model programs, ideas, contacts. One of 11 "must reading" books selected by the National School Boards Association in its 1977 annual roundup of education books. (88p; 1977; Stock No. 021-00380)

Teacher Competency: Problems and Solutions (available November 1979; Stock No. 021-00332).

How Schools Can Save $$: Problems and Solutions (available January 1980; Stock No. 021-00333).

Ordering information: Order from the American Association of School Administrators, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, Va. 22209. Single copy, $8.95 plus $1 for postage and handling. Two to nine copies of the same title, 10% discount. Write for prices on 10 or more copies. Orders for less than $15 must be accompanied by payment in full. Please include stock numbers.